Mane on the Africa Cup of Nations | Semi-final heroes | Life outside football: a special report!

LIVERPOOL FC



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Official Liverpool FC Monthly Magazine

ISSUE 054

LFC Mag Feb 2017 £4.25

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"WE CAN MAKE THIS YEAR EVEN BETTER"

KLOPP'S MESSAGE FOR THE FANS

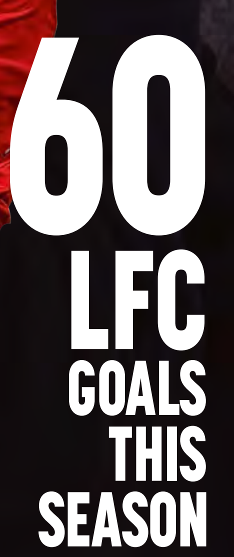
EMRE CAN

ON HIS FIRST 100 LFC APPS

GEORGINIO WIJNALDUM

HOW THE MANAGER HAS IMPROVED MY GAME

HERE'S TO A BOSS 2017



60 LFC GOALS THIS SEASON

Issue 54 February 2017

Contents

New year; same dreams, passion and excitement. Welcome to the first issue of the official Liverpool FC monthly magazine for 2017 – and let's roar the Reds to glory!

LIVERPOOL

A lively front section exploring the wider LFC world and keeping fans up-to-date with what's happening and what's about to.

FOOTBALL

The stuff that happens on the pitch: exclusive interviews with current Reds stars, the stats that matter plus a few blasts from the past.

CLUB

How the club reaches out to communities at home and abroad, plus stadium news, fab official merchandise, and fan representatives.

Trinity Mirror Sport Media
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Stairway to heaven
Fans on the Main Stand's concourse stairs ahead of the home game against Manchester City on New Year's Eve. Liverpool FC's first nine Premier League fixtures at Anfield this season have yielded an aggregate attendance of 477,730 – an average of over 53,000 per game.





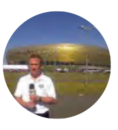
Anfield's average Premier League gate is over 53,000 but what's been the highest and lowest up to and inc 31 Dec 2016? Answer p98

Which current first-teamer runs a cafe back home, and which former Reds race cars and fish for salmon respectively?

REDS ON INSTAGRAM

Rounding up some of the best posts from Reds players and fans





@keith03
Last interview of a great day at Melwood. Couldn't meet a nicer guy than @gwijnaldum





@dejanlovren06
Yesss boysss 😁 great to finish the year with a nice win 💪 let's continue like this in 2017... everyone from the team is wishing you a Happy New Year...#ynwa





@leivalucas
Happy New Year 🙏 2017



@waydedreamer
Amazing experience. #LFC
🔴🔴🔴



@iamdanielsturridge
😎👌





@jerzydudek1
Happy New 2017 Year Everyone !!
Szcz liwego nowego roku !!!



@liverpoolfc
Not long to go until Christmas!
#LFC #Liverpool #Squad #Team #Training #Smile!



@luchogarcia14
Enjoying as a kid !! Last couple of days in the Pirineos
#Snowboard #Winter #Sports



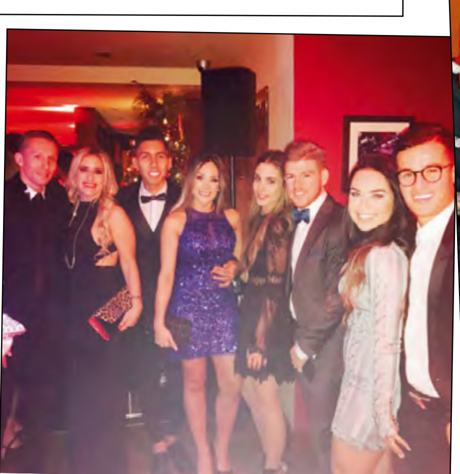
@carlilloyd
A pleasure meeting you
@jhenderson! Big fan.
All the best to you and the team

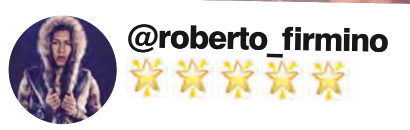


@grujicmarko
Wishing you a very Merry Christmas!
🎁🎄🎅



@stevengerrard
When you bumped into a good
mate at breakfast #kolo #lfc
#dubai 😂





@roberto_firmino
🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟





@ingstagram10
It was so nice visiting the kids at
Alder Hey today ☺️❤️
#Christmas #thumbsup👍





@paddypb23
Absolutely brilliant day
at Anfield with my boy⚽
#greattobeback #mainstand
#LFC #greatwin #merrychristmas

MY OTHER JOB IS...

Life beyond football – really? Away from the action here's how some current and former Reds have passed the time



MAGAZINES

Former central defender **Phil Babb**, who played for Liverpool between 1994 and 1999, moved in to the publishing industry after he retired from playing to launch golf and football magazines.

"I really enjoyed getting involved and starting out with a blank piece of paper before bringing it all to fruition and producing a magazine that was on the shelves in places like WH Smith. I certainly learned a lot about the publishing game and golf, and was lucky enough to interview some of the top players including guys like Tiger Woods. It was an eye-opener."



HAULAGE



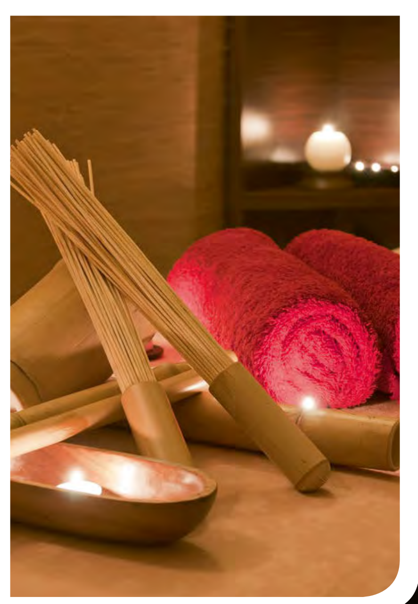
Sixties forward **Roger Hunt** scored 285 goals for Liverpool and won the World Cup with England before hitting the road. "I then went into the family road-haulage business called Hunt brothers. My father and my uncle started it. I worked there for 23 years before handing over the reins to two of my nephews."





MASSAGE

Torben Piechnik qualified as a masseur when he retired from football and now owns Piechnik Massage in Hoersholm, Denmark, the only place where you can get a *Fuld kropsmassage* from a former centre-half for 600 krone (about £57).



HOLIDAY HOMES

David Burrows, once a Liverpool left-back, now lives a more serene life in the South of France. He and wife Jacqueline rent out *La Gardelle* – a detached two-bedroom property in the picturesque village of Le Bugue, Dordogne. During his playing days he invested in property, although as recently as 2011 he was still turning out for the local village team. "It's not like playing in front of the Kop on a Saturday afternoon. Where our pitch is, all you can see is rolling hillsides, vineyards and a river – though there's a couple of cows in the next field who take a passing interest."



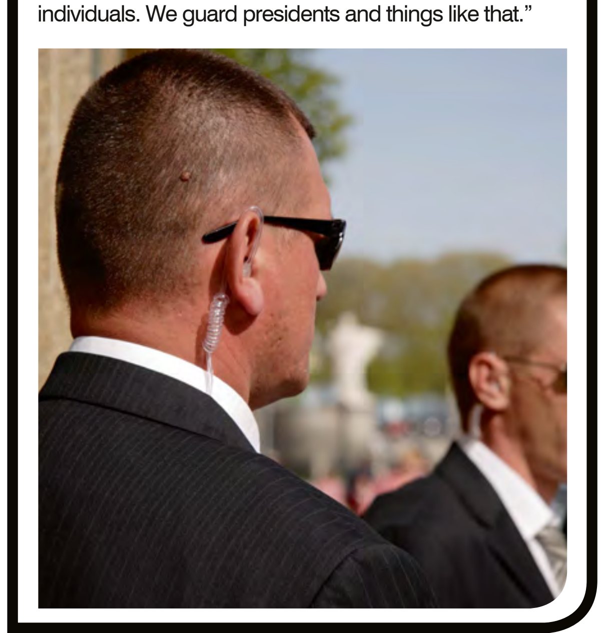
RACING CARS

Jerzy Dudek, once the big Pole in our goal, is now a racing driver and says: "To compare playing in goal and driving the car, it's almost the same. You are alone [and] you have to make quick decisions… When you go out of your goal and you miss the ball, it's a goal. When you make a bad decision on the track, you're off the track, or you crash into someone else and you're both off the track. It's all about decisions, focus, concentration and a little bit also, I have to say, madness!"



PERSONAL SECURITY

Michael Thomas left Arsenal for Liverpool then stayed on Merseyside upon his retirement from playing. Now, he says, "I have a chauffeur company and a security company for high-level individuals. We guard presidents and things like that."





FISH

Ex-right-back **Vegard Heggem** runs a salmon-fishing lodge back home in Norway. He's told LFCTV: "I've got a passion for fishing and the Atlantic salmon is one of the really iconic fish of the world. In Liverpool I started to think about what to do when my playing days were over. The thought of building a fishing lodge on my childhood farm [near Trondheim] sounded interesting. So as soon as I moved back I got stuck into this project which I've been running for 12 years."



LAW & ORDER

The legend that was **Billy Liddell** was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Liverpool in 1958. He'd also trained as an accountant before becoming the linchpin of the Reds side of the 1950s.





NURSERIES

Injuries forced former right-back **Rob Jones** to retire prematurely at the age of 27. "My wife had always wanted to get into childcare, so we decided to open a nursery. We've got several in England and have now opened franchises in the United Arab Emirates."



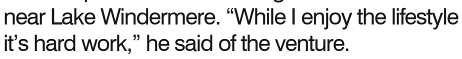
DO IT YERSELF

Pine DIY, which later changed its name to **Phil Thompson** Pine DIY, was where Thommo reckons he honed the punditry skills he displays on TV. "I had invested in the company but had been more of a sleeping partner. I'd be sitting in the back office, holding court about football, and the lads would say 'You should be on this Sky Sports channel'."



PUBS

Flying Sixties winger **Peter Thompson** owned two caravan parks near Blackpool, one of which he sold to fund the purchase of the Hare and Hounds pub in Bowland Bridge near Lake Windermere. "While I enjoy the lifestyle it's hard work," he said of the venture.





TELEVISION

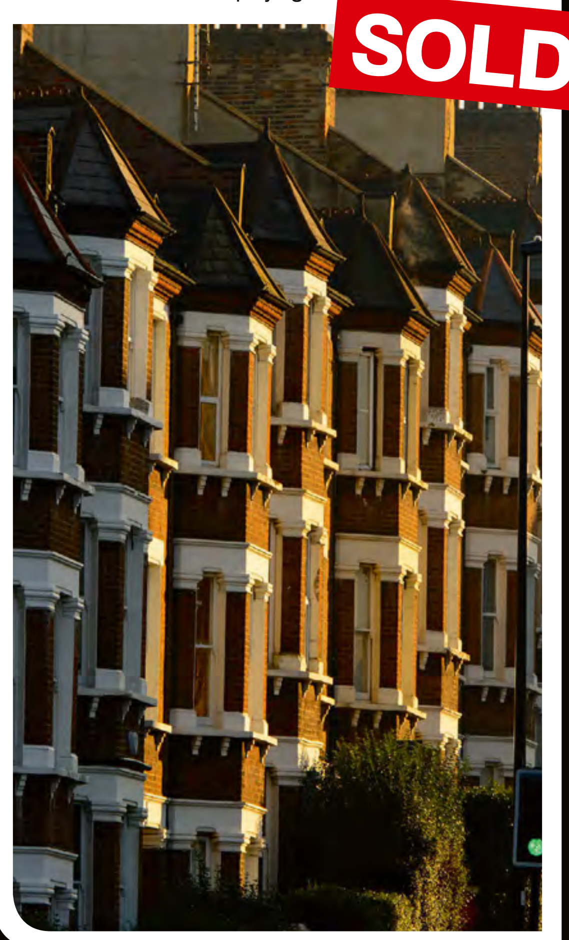


Ian St John was one of the first former Liverpool players to move into the world of television on a regular basis, hosting much-loved ITV show *Saint and Greavsie* alongside ex-Spurs man Jimmy Greaves. The series, screened at lunchtime on a Saturday, ran from 1985 until 1992.



PROPERTY

Manchester City supporters used to sing 'We all live in a **Robbie Fowler** home' during his later playing days in Manchester, in homage to his expanding property empire. He later explained: "Graeme Souness put me in touch with a financial adviser who advised me to go into property. Since then, and I'm not embarrassed to admit this, it's my wife who's been wearing the trousers. She's the boss. She did it all while I was playing."





COFFEE

Reds goalie **Simon Mignolet** has opened *TwentyTwo Coffee* in his hometown of Sint-Truiden in Belgium. "I've always wanted to do something in business, and to put it simply, I like coffee," he explains. "That was a big part of it. Another reason is that when I go home to Belgium I will have a coffee with my mum and dad or my granddad. It's part of the lifestyle and a way of socialising.

"Here [in England] you get takeaway coffees which aren't as popular in Belgium, but we have started doing that in the shop. We think it's a good concept. I'm not sure if it's going to ever compete with Costa or Starbucks but it's going well at the moment."

Simon's recommendation? "A flat white. Originally it's from New Zealand. It's more popular here in England rather than Belgium where it isn't so well-known. But people seem to be enjoying it."

THE GEE GEES

From people's passion to sport of kings… Prolific goal-getter **Michael Owen** owns a stables in Cheshire with over 90 horses. He says: "The joy of owning a racehorse is indescribable, from buying them as youngsters, watching them develop and seeing their first visit to a racecourse.

"I've owned horses for many years and whenever I have time off, you'll find me down at the stables."



WHAT'S

WEMBLEY DREAMS

Jürgen Klopp will be aiming to lead Liverpool to Wembley in the League Cup for the second successive season when his team take on Southampton in a two-legged semi-final. The first leg takes place at St Mary's on Wednesday 11 January (kick-off 7.45pm) with the return at Anfield a fortnight later (8pm). Earlier this season the teams played out an entertaining goalless draw in a Premier League match on the South Coast.



CHELSEA HERE

Premier League pacesetters Chelsea are in town on Tuesday 31 January with Liverpool bidding to complete a Premier League double over the West London side. Goals from Dejan Lovren and Jordan Henderson earned a 2-1 win at Stamford Bridge back in September.



UP FOR THE CUP

Should Liverpool overcome Plymouth Argyle in their first home game of 2017 on Sunday 8 January, they will enter the draw for the fourth round of the Emirates FA Cup. Ties are set to be played over the 'long' weekend of Friday 27 to Monday 30 Jan. The Reds went out of last season's tournament at the fourth-round stage after an extra-time replay defeat at West Ham United.

ON: JAN

UNITED AWAY

The big games keep coming in January and LFC make the short trip to Old Trafford on Sunday 15 January to take on Jose Mourinho's Manchester United. Earlier this season, the two teams cancelled each other out at Anfield with neither side able to find the net. The game will also be screened in the Main Stand hospitality lounges at Anfield with tickets priced £19 for adults, children (five-to-sixteen) £9 and under-fives free. Call 0151 264 2222 or visit liverpoolfc.com/awayscreening for further details. The following day the teams meet again in Under-23s action with a 7pm kick-off at Anfield.



Birthdays and anniversaries



James Milner 31 on 4 January
David Fairclough 60 on 5 January
Hughie McAuley 64 on 8 January
Lucas 30 on 9 January
Ray Houghton 55 on 9 January
Emre Can 23 on 12 January
Peter Beardsley 56 on 18 January
Phil Thompson 63 on 21 January
Jamie Carragher 39 on 28 January
Peter Crouch 36 on 30 January

9 years since Martin Skrtel signed for LFC on 11 January
20 years since Jamie Carragher scored his first goal for the Reds on 18 January
30 years since John Aldridge joined LFC on 27 January
39 years since Graeme Souness made his Liverpool debut on 14 January
71 years since Billy Liddell and Bob Paisley made their LFC debuts on 5 January



Lucas equalises against Havant

It's nine years since Lucas scored his first goal for Liverpool on 26 January 2008.

The year 2017 will see him celebrate a decade as a Liverpool player. The Brazilian has given sterling service even if goals have been few and far between.

The first time he found the net in a red shirt came during his debut season of 2007/08 when he grabbed an equaliser in an FA Cup fourth-round tie against Havant and Waterlooville at Anfield. Having suffered the shock of falling behind to a ninth-minute goal from Richard Pacquette, the Reds went on to defeat the non-leaguers 5-2, with Lucas curling home from 20 yards at the Anfield Road end.

He's since scored a handful more for the Reds with his six goals coming in five different competitions!

FIXTURES 2016/2017

AUGUST

Sun 14	Arsenal (A)	4-3
Sat 20	Burnley (A)	0-2
Tue 23	Burton (A, EFL2)	5-0
Sat 27	Tottenham H (A)	1-1

SEPTEMBER

Sat 10	Leicester City (H)	4-1
Fri 16	Chelsea (A)	2-1
Tue 20	Derby (A, EFL3)	3-0
Sat 24	Hull City (H)	5-1

OCTOBER

Sat 1	Swansea City (A)	2-1
Mon 17	Manchester Utd (H)	0-0
Sat 22	West Brom (H)	2-1
Tue 25	Tottenham (H, EFL4)	2-1
Sat 29	Crystal Palace (A)	4-2

NOVEMBER

Sun 6	Watford (H)	6-1
Sat 19	Southampton (A)	0-0
Sat 26	Sunderland (H)	2-0
Tue 29	Leeds Utd (H, EFL5)	2-0

DECEMBER

Sun 4	Bournemouth (A)	3-4
Sun 11	West Ham United (H)	2-2
Wed 14	Middlesbrough (A)	3-0
Mon 19	Everton (A, 8pm)	1-0
Tue 27	Stoke City (H)	4-1
Sat 31	Man City (H, 5.30pm)	1-0

JANUARY

Mon 2	Sunderland (A, 3pm)	2-2
Sun 8	Plymouth Arg (H, FAC3, 1.30pm)	
Wed 11	Sout'pton (A, EFL SF 1L, 7.45pm)	
Sun 15	Manchester Utd (A, 4pm)	
Sat 21	Swansea City (H, 12.30pm)	
Wed 25	Southampton (H, EFL SF 2L, 8pm)	
28/29	Emirates FA Cup R4	
Tue 31	Chelsea (H, 8pm)	

FEBRUARY

Sat 4	Hull City (A, 3pm)
Sat 11	Tottenham Hotspur (H, 5.30pm)
18/19	Emirates FA Cup R5
Sun 26	EFL Cup final
Mon 27	Leicester City (A, 8pm)

MARCH

Sat 4	Arsenal (H, 3pm)
Sun 12	Burnley (H, 4pm)/FAC 6
Sat 18	Manchester City (A, 3pm)

APRIL

Sat 1	Everton (H, 3pm)
Wed 5	Bournemouth (H, 8pm)
Sat 8	Stoke City (A, 3pm)
Sun 16	West Brom (A, 3pm)
Sat 22	Crystal Palace (H, 3pm)
22/23	Emirates FA Cup SF
Sat 29	Watford (A, 3pm)

MAY

Sat 6	Southampton (H, 3pm)
Sat 13	West Ham United (A, 3pm)
Sun 21	Middlesbrough (H, 3pm)
Sat 27	Emirates FA Cup final

(LFC score shown first, all dates/KO times subject to change)


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FOOTBALL

Exclusive in-depth interviews with Gini and Emre and the ultimate LFC goal archive from the first half of season 2016/17



Adam Lallana celebrates one of his two strikes at Middlesbrough – but at which ground did he get his first Liverpool FC goal of this season? Answer on p98

MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

In his matchday programme notes for the last game of 2016 the gaffer had this to say to supporters

Reds manager Jürgen Klopp is hoping 2017 will be one to remember for Liverpool Football Club. Speaking to our sister publication *This Is Anfield* for the final game of 2016 against Manchester City, he said: "I think what we have shown is that we are on the right path and in a really good way.

"We have a good squad with hungry, talented players. These are players who want to be here, want to perform and be successful for LFC. They want to learn and get even better. We have a home, in Anfield, that thanks to our owners has got bigger and improved. And I think most importantly, we have a sense that we are together; every part of the club feels the positivity and is looking forward and sensing a future of good times and great moments."

The manager is also delighted with the progress of the youngsters supplementing his senior squad. The first half of this season has already seen Ovie Ejaria, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Ben Woodburn make their first-team debuts and others have also taken the eye while training at Melwood.

"With the young players it's always about a feeling," he explained. "I will see them in training and just feel that it's a good moment. They are always ready. If you ask them, nobody would say: 'Please don't let me play'. They are ready. It's my decision in the end but my decision depends always on what I see and what I feel. At Middlesbrough, for instance, we were able to bring them on [the youngsters] because of how the game was at that moment with us in a really strong position.

"You should not bring young players on at the moment to change a game as they need to collect experience. But if there are no alternatives or if something happened in training before one of the games, maybe they would start a game. We are not in doubt about their quality."

Klopp is also confident that his side is more than capable of dealing with the pressures that the second half of the campaign will bring, pointing to December's derby success as an example. "Dealing with pressure [in football] is not so different from normal life. It's about being as well-prepared as possible performance-wise so that then you are confident. At the end it is not about ignoring the circumstances, it is about using the circumstances. We have spoken a little bit over the past few weeks about being angry but we mean angry in a sports-way angry and that is really important in a games like those.

"In preparation for a game you don't have to talk too much about motivation or things like this because if you respect your team and you know about the character of the team, then it is clear that they are full of motivation, so it is really more about doing the right thing at the right moment even in a very emotional atmosphere.

"Everybody was looking forward to the Everton game because everybody was 100 per cent prepared. The moment when you get a little bit nervous is just before the start. That is absolutely normal. It is like an actor in the theatre. The last seconds before you go on stage may not be the most enjoyable but they are part of the attitude and part of the mood, so you always need that."

The win over the Blues in the Reds' final away game of 2016 was not only the manager's first win at Goodison Park, it was also his first visit – well, sort of! "Around 10 to 12 years ago I made a commercial for a car company. They had a funny idea because they wanted to visit the homes of famous footballers without saying the name of them so we were going around the places where they grew up. In this case it was Wayne Rooney. We were outside Goodison Park but I didn't go inside – that was my only previous experience."

All things considered, the boss is optimistic the Reds can enjoy a happy new year. "We all believe, together, that we can make the next year even better than the one that came before it. That should always be our aim: appreciate what has gone before, enjoy the present and be excited about the future. I think this will be LFC in 2017."


JK
L.F.C.
BETVICTOR



LEAGUE CUP LEGENDS

This month Liverpool make a record 17th appearance in the last four – and here are the Redmen who lit up previous semi-finals

2016 SIMON SAVES

STOKE CITY 0 LIVERPOOL 1; LIVERPOOL 0 STOKE CITY 1 (6-5 PENS)

Two-hundred-and-ten-minutes concluded with Reds keeper Simon Mignolet keeping the Potters' spot-kickers at bay.

This was an engaging semi-final over two legs three weeks apart. The opening game at the Britannia Stadium came just a few days after a disappointing Liverpool defeat at West Ham, a performance that Jürgen Klopp labelled "passive."

The team responded aggressively, harassing Mark Hughes' men into mistakes and earning a 1-0 victory thanks to Jordon Ibe's goal – despite losing both Philippe Coutinho and Dejan Lovren to hamstring injuries and ending up with Lucas as a makeshift centre-back at the end of the match.

In the return leg that most slender of leads was cancelled out on the stroke of half time at Anfield, a marginally offside Marko Arnautovic putting the ball in the net for Stoke. The second 45 minutes and the additional half-hour only saw one real goal threat of note, Marco van Ginkel hitting the post for the visitors.

In the shootout Van Ginkel did score to put his side 5-4 ahead. But when Lucas levelled and Mignolet, who'd already denied Crouch, saved Marc Muniesa's effort, it meant Joe Allen was the man with the chance to win the contest. The Welsh midfielder duly sent Liverpool to 'Wembley South' once more.



Mignolet makes the difference

Steven Gerrard scored from the spot in both legs, yet it was the performance of Craig Bellamy at Anfield that remains vivid.

"I felt like I didn't have anything to prove to anybody at Man City," the Welshman recalls of his old club in his autobiography. "They held me in high esteem and I did the same with them. I wanted to enjoy the matches against them. Over two legs the best team would go through.

"We won the first leg at the Etihad 1-0 with a Steven Gerrard penalty. For them to get to the final, they'd have to beat us at Anfield on a midweek night in front of a packed house…

"Nigel de Jong put them ahead after half-an-hour and we equalised with another Gerrard penalty just before half-time. Edin Dzeko put them 2-1 up midway through the second half but then 15 minutes from the end, Glen Johnson and I exchanged passes in front of the Kop end and I darted into the area and slid the ball past Joe Hart into the corner of the net. City couldn't score again. We were through.

"And so I'd scored the goal that had given this club that I loved so much the opportunity to go back to Wembley for the first time since 1996. Kenny brought me off two minutes from the end and even the City fans applauded me. I knew now I had a chance now to lift a trophy with Liverpool."

2012 BRILLIANT BELLAMY

MAN CITY 0
LIVERPOOL 1;
LIVERPOOL 2
MAN CITY 2



You beauty!



The winner at Watford

2005 STEVEN'S STING

LIVERPOOL 1
WATFORD 0;
WATFORD 0
LIVERPOOL 1

At the time the Hornets may have been a division below the Reds but there was little to separate the sides, with only a Steven Gerrard goal in each leg making the difference. At Anfield he pounced on a loose ball to find the net via a deflection off a defender on the line, while in the return a forward surge concluded with a fine low finish. Liverpool were through to their first final under Rafa Benitez, and after the second leg at Vicarage Road the manager credited the skipper who hadn't been 100 per cent fit. "Steven Gerrard is so important for us. If he plays well, we play well as a team. He'd been struggling with a slight injury but is almost back to normal. He has had to be careful in the last few games but it is no longer a problem. As long as he is okay to play, he will always play. I am not surprised at how good a player he is as I had seen him before. After six months of working with him you just realise it more." Former Liverpool skipper Alan Hansen summed up Gerrard's contribution in simpler terms: "He is the best midfielder in the country by a mile."

2003 OWEN EDGES IT

SHEFF UNITED 2 LIVERPOOL 1; LIVERPOOL 2 SHEFF UNITED 0 (AET)

Neil Warnock's second-tier outfit were after their third Premier League scalp following earlier victories over Leeds United and Sunderland, in what was their best-ever run in the competition.

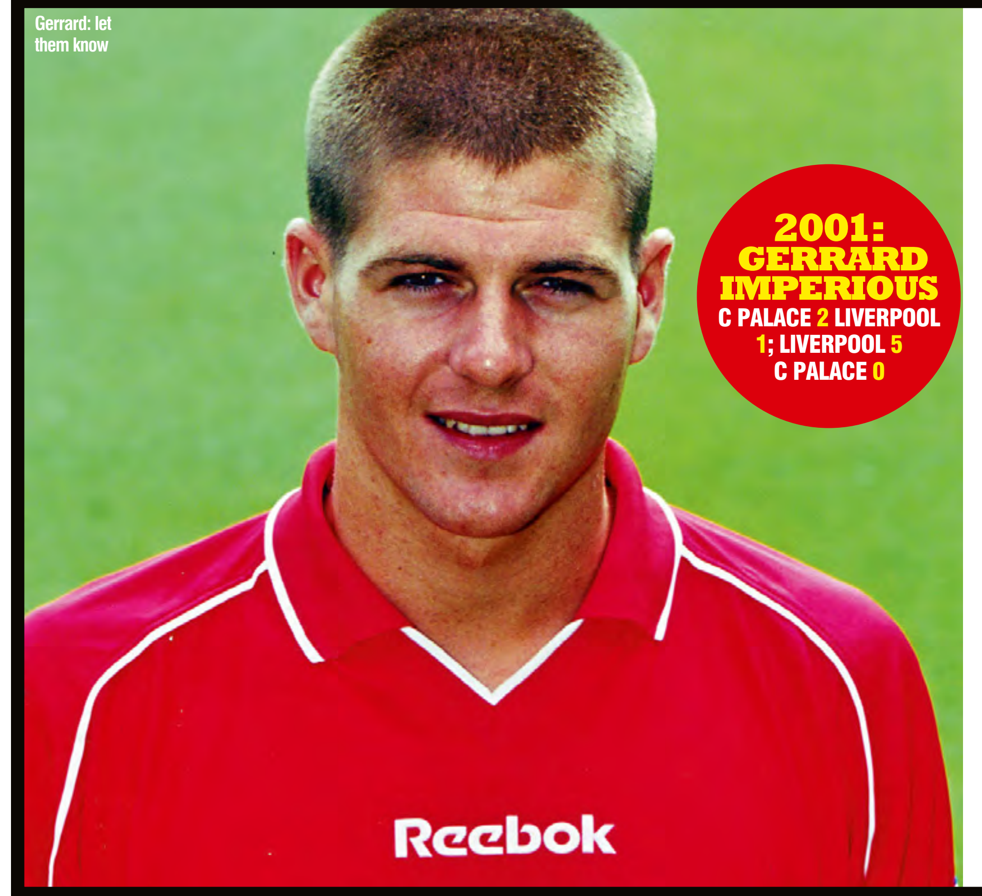
They won the first leg 2-1 with two strikes from Michael Tonge after Neil Mellor had headed Liverpool into the lead with his debut goal for the club.

Seven minutes into the Anfield return El-Hadji Diouf beat Blades goalkeeper Paddy Kenny with a low drive, but the underdogs were only undone in extra-time when Michael Owen raced through and beat Kenny.

Following the 2000/01 semi with Palace, it was the second successive time that Liverpool had reached the final after losing the first leg 2-1. The *Daily Mail* reported: 'The Liverpool striker might not be the most successful gambler but as a scorer of crucial goals, he once again proved a master of the art. Owen struck 107 minutes into this quite extraordinary Worthington Cup semi-final encounter to silence a spirited Sheffield United side who had pushed their illustrious opponents to the very end in pursuit of a glorious date in Cardiff.

'It was a moment to savour, a wonderful goal that capped three-and-a-half hours of football'.

A mazy Michael run



Gerrard: let them know

2001: GERRARD IMPERIOUS

C PALACE 2 LIVERPOOL 1; LIVERPOOL 5 C PALACE 0

Vladimir Smicer (2), Danny Murphy (2), Igor Biscan and Robbie Fowler got the half-dozen goals over two legs to secure safe passage to Cardiff. Yet it was the early impact of 20-year-old Steven Gerrard which was picked out by assistant-boss Phil Thompson.

"When we lost 2-1 in the first leg we were thankful for a late Vladimir Smicer goal that kept us in the tie," said Thommo. "Their striker Clinton Morrison had a go at Michael Owen and we used it to inspire a reaction. I would have put my house on us beating them convincingly in the return.

"They had a lively Latvian winger in Andrejs Rubins, who had caused us some trouble. In the return we played Igor [Biscan] in centre-midfield and put Steven Gerrard at right-back to deal with the wide threat. I remember Stevie putting in this tackle early on that took me back to the days of Tommy Smith.

"Stevie's sliding tackle carried all of his bodyweight behind it and this boy ended up on the track. He wasn't much of a threat after that. We'd shown our intent and went on to win 5-0."

Words: John Hynes

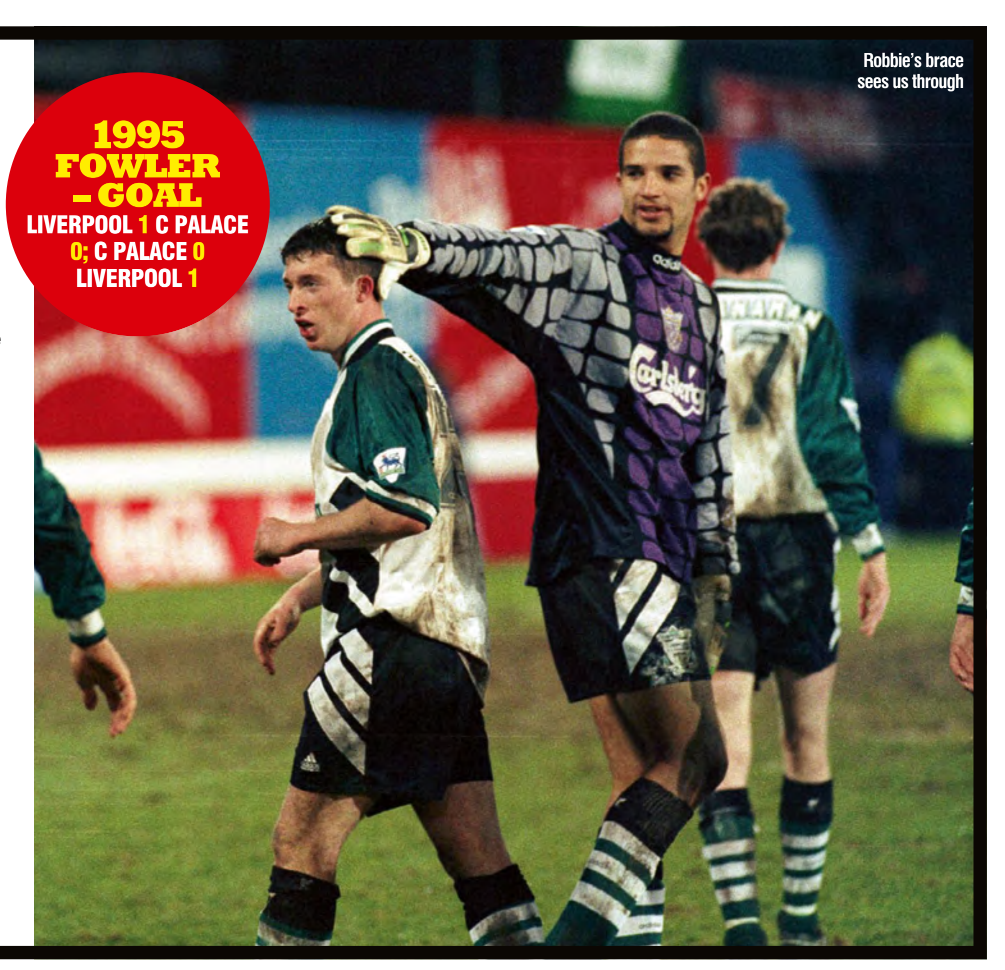
1995 FOWLER – GOAL

LIVERPOOL 1 C PALACE 0; C PALACE 0 LIVERPOOL 1

Liverpool's ninth League Cup semi paired them with newly-promoted Palace. Both legs were settled by Robbie Fowler goals.

At Anfield the Reds forced 17 corners but had to wait until the 92nd minute for Fowler's finish to give them a slender advantage. Robbie later wrote in his autobiography: "The first leg at Anfield turned into one of those games. We had a few chances but couldn't get the goal, and as the ref was about to blow for the end Rob Jones fed the ball along the right touchline to Steve McManaman. He beat his man and swept the cross into the far post. The ball was blocked and spun out towards the edge of the area. I was waiting there and had to hit the shot instantly on the half-volley with my right foot. It went into the far corner, into the side-net.

"Anfield erupted. We didn't play the second leg for three weeks because their pitch was water-logged, but we beat them 1-0 in that one too, and I scored again, a left-foot shot this time from a pretty acute angle, in the side of the net to boot."



Robbie's brace sees us through



Rush and Whelan get the goals









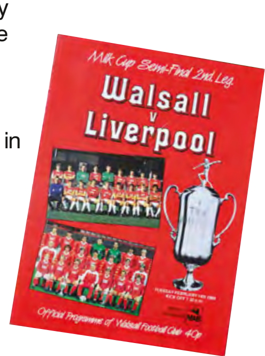
1984 RUSHIE & RONNIE

LIVERPOOL 2 WALSALL 2; WALSALL 0 LIVERPOOL 2

A Phil Neal own-goal had contributed to a shock 2-2 draw with the Third Division side in the first leg at Anfield and left boss Joe Fagan fuming: "Every one of our players were committed but it's not enough. We haven't got a player with real flair, honest-to-goodness effort."

The team responded a week later with Rush heading the opener inside 13 minutes. "Many believed our semi-final against Walsall would prove easy but it was anything but," the Welsh centre-forward recalled. "It proved tougher than the final score suggests."

Rush's opener was complemented by a Ronnie Whelan strike from eight yards after the interval. Liverpool were on their way to Wembley for the first-ever all-Merseyside cup final. Saddlers boss Alan Buckley reflected: "Had we faced any other side than the most ruthlessly professional outfit in Great Britain, with wonderful skills to boot, I believe Walsall would have been at Wembley."



"I HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE"

Six months into his Anfield career Georginio Wijnaldum says he's already improved as a player under Jürgen Klopp


LFC

Did you watch a lot of English football when you were a kid?
Yes, we had *Match of the Day* on TV in Holland and I would watch it to see my favourite players. I always liked goalscorers, the main men in the team. Alan Shearer and Michael Owen were probably my two favourites at the time because they were always on TV.

You've been at Liverpool for six months now, how have you found working under Jürgen Klopp?
I like it. I like the fact he's not pretending to be somebody; he is the character he is. That's him. In training we see it every day and I've never met a trainer like him. He really cares about football and the players and tries to make us better. Of course he can get mad or get annoyed but only if we don't do the things we are good at. For example, if you are a good dribbler then he wants you to dribble – in the right areas of course. He always tells us that he wants us to use our big qualities to the maximum and gives us a lot of confidence.



"I'VE NEVER MET A TRAINER LIKE JURGEN KLOPP, HE REALLY CARES ABOUT FOOTBALL AND HIS TEAM"

Do you think working with Jürgen has helped you to improve?
In my opinion it has helped me to improve a lot. In the beginning I was more of an attacking midfielder than a holding midfielder. Now I intercept balls and try to be a good link between the defence and the attackers. I think that I have learned so much since I've been here. That's because of the way we play and the fact that there are a lot of really good players here. Working with so much quality each day makes you better. The way we train, always at 100 per cent, helps players to improve too.

On the subject of training, can you tell us more about it?
Our training is just like a real game. Every exercise – whether it's a passing drill or something else – has to be done like you would do it in a game. If it's not 100 per cent then the manager will say so. How we play is the same as how we train. We always train hard and try to recreate game-situations where we need to move the ball quickly. For example, we might do one-touch sessions in training where you have to move quickly, look for spaces and switch the play. The manager wants that. There isn't much time in games, especially against good teams, so being able to do one-touch passing is vital.

Does trying to play at such pace make more mistakes inevitable?
If you are trying to do things in a rush you can make mistakes, that is true. But if you move the ball too slowly you won't find spaces. It's about playing at the right tempo and if the tempo isn't correct you can feel it. When you do get the tempo right you know it and it helps you to create a lot of chances.

Had you ever played in a team that tries to move the ball so quickly?
No, never. It wasn't easy to adjust to it at the beginning but I adapted. I was lucky because I arrived early in pre-season and went on the training camp in America where I quickly learned how the manager wants us to play. If I had arrived at the club at the end of the transfer-window it might have been tougher. It was a big difference to what I've experienced previously. Jürgen says we don't have four defenders or seven or eight. We have eleven defenders and eleven attackers. Everyone is responsible for everything.

Of course running off the ball is just as important as quick movement with it...
It depends on the situation. If you have the ball a lot it's obviously difficult to outrun the opponent because they are chasing it. Jurgen wants us to counter-press. He wants us to press and make runs to open up space for other players. Even if we have the ball we do run a lot. We run to close down teams and we run to help us to create chances.

It seems to be an enjoyable way to play...
Yeah, it's really fun. The fact that we have won a lot of games this season gives us confidence. Then you enjoy your football even more. If you don't win a lot it's difficult to enjoy it and see the fun. Now, here at Liverpool, I'm seeing the other side of the game and it's wonderful.



"I USED TO BE AN ATTACKING MIDFIELDER BUT NOW I TRY TO LINK DEFENCE AND ATTACK"



“HERE AT LIVERPOOL I’M SEEING THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GAME AND IT’S WONDERFUL”

Does a different type of pressure come with being at the bottom of the table compared to being closer to the top of it?
I think if you win a lot, as we have done this season, then people – the supporters, the press – expect you to win even more. That expectation is much more preferable. To be honest, though, I don't really feel too much pressure when I play. I just try to enjoy the moment. We all work hard to get to this situation in our careers, it's not just normal to be a player in the Premier League. So I want to enjoy it as much as possible.

You scored 11 goals for Newcastle last season – do you think you can get as many this year?
Not scoring as many so far doesn't really bother me. It's a different situation. I play in a different position and we play a different way to how it was at Newcastle. I still have faith that a few more goals will come for me, but I'm just happy that I am part of this team.

A lot was made of the fact that all of your Newcastle goals came at home, and your first two Liverpool goals, v Watford and Man City, were also at Anfield...
Yeah, I don't know why that is. It's strange. To be fair, it doesn't bother me where I score. I think it was more of an issue for the media than for me. Of course I want to score lots away from home. But I just want to score everywhere.

Have you noticed opponents altering their normal style when they come to Anfield?
Definitely. From what I see, some of them drop deep a lot to try to stop us creating chances. When we analyse teams when they face us, I see they don't play how they usually do. That gives me a good feeling because it shows they know we are a threat. It's difficult to deal with, but we always try to play our own game: counter-pressing and trying to create spaces.

"I STILL BELIEVE THAT I'LL SCORE MORE GOALS BUT I'M JUST HAPPY TO BE PART OF THIS TEAM"

Which of your Liverpool colleagues is most likely to be a successful manager?
Hendo. I say that for a few reasons. First of all, he's a great captain. The way he speaks to the players is superb. He's doesn't force it, he's just a natural leader. I think that and the way he thinks about the game could mean he becomes a good manager, if that is what he wants to do.

Dutch players have a reputation for speaking their minds – do you think that is correct?
[Laughs] In other countries they say Dutch people think they are better or always have to give an answer…
It's probably true! We always have our own opinions and that's different from other places.


Winter-time training

Shielding the ball in the win at Crystal Palace

I think, as with any country, the various parts of Holland have their own ways. In Rotterdam people are really direct and say what they think. I'm from there and grew up there so I say what I think. Maybe it's not always nice but it's the truth. When I went to PSV Eindhoven I found that people thought a bit more about it and didn't want to hurt someone's feelings. So they didn't always say what they thought. So maybe they tried to be more gentle with their words.

It was during your time at PSV that you broke into the Dutch national team and played at the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil...
Definitely. It was my third season with PSV, I had started well that year then I got injured. I hurt my back and was out for seven months. But the season ended well with the World Cup. [Netherlands coach] Louis van Gaal still had faith in me and I played every game in Brazil. That was great because during my time out I never expected to be involved.

I hadn't played in any of the qualifiers but the manager gave me an opportunity. I don't think many [managers] would take that kind of risk with a player who had been out for so long. I didn't have a reputation as a top player such as someone like Arjen Robben. My only experience was a friendly match [before the tournament] and that was enough for the manager, even though – in his opinion – I didn't defend so well and made some mistakes in that game. But he believed in me. He told me that I was a player that he liked, that I fitted the profile of what he wanted and he was going to include me.

Looking back it must be one of the highlights of your career so far...
Travelling to the World Cup was special for my family. My grandmother, mother, uncle and girlfriend all came with me and it was great to share those moments with them because my family is everything to me. That summer is one of my best memories. When we were over there my grandmother was 83 and still wanted to walk to the stadium or the beach. She really enjoyed the trip, and the fact we went so far in the competition was brilliant. We were very close to getting to the final, just losing out on penalties to Argentina in the semi-final before beating Brazil in the third place play-off.

After doing so well Holland then failed to reach Euro 2016 – how did that affect the squad?



"WE HAVE A YOUNG, NEW DUTCH SQUAD AND WE CAN DO BEAUTFIUL THINGS"

Following on from the World Cup finals in Brazil we felt that we were a good team with a good spirt and that we could achieve even more; that we could go to the European Championships in France and win the tournament. We'd finished third at the 2014 World Cup and Germany were the only other European team to do better. So we felt we could definitely take the next step and compete for the trophy.
Unfortunately it obviously didn't work out that way and not qualifying for the tournament wasn't just a big disappointment for the players but for the whole country.

Now we are only looking forward. A lot of new players have come into the squad. We have a young team but we know nothing is impossible. Germany started out this way a few years ago and eventually became world champions. Belgium also began with a young team. If we maintain the good spirt and believe in each other we can do beautiful things. It won't be easy of course but I'm positive about it.



Gini battles with ex-Red Javier Mascherano in the 2014 World Cup semi-final between the Netherlands and Argentina

FINISHING SCHOOL

Every Liverpool goal from the first half of the 2016/17 season. Happy New Year!

COUTINHO v Arsenal First-half stoppage-time on the opening weekend of the 2016/17 season and Coutinho, who's won the free-kick 35 yards from the Arsenal goal, curls home the equaliser that precedes three more second-half strikes from the Reds in a thrilling second period.

LALLANA v Arsenal It's a blistering start to the second period at the Emirates Stadium as Coutinho flicks the ball through to Wijnaldum who checks in the penalty area, looks up and finds Lallana. The England ace takes the ball on his chest before sweeping it home at the back post.

COUTINHO v Arsenal Seven minutes after Lallana puts Liverpool 3-1 up at the Emirates, the little Brazilian magician strikes again: great work down the right from Clyne whose hard low cross is diverted into the net from Coutinho's left foot in a blink of goalkeeper Petr Cech's eye.

MANE v Arsenal Mane chases a Lallana pass down the right-hand channel and ties two Arsenal markers in knots with his searing pace and twisting turn. The shot explodes from his left boot and is in the back of the net before keeper Cech hits the ground – 4-1 to the Reds!



ORIGI v Burton Albion A hectic quarter-of-an-hour gone in this EFL Cup second-round tie when Mane brilliantly kills Milner's cross, speeds past his marker and squares for Origi to back-heel into the net from inside the six-yard box against the Championship hosts. The Reds are ahead!

FIRMINO v Burton Albion Burton keeper Stephen Bywater has already saved spectacularly from Firmino but he's powerless to stop this guided header into the corner from a deep cross by Clyne. It's the Brazilian's first goal for the Reds in domestic cup football. Two-nil now.



OWN-GOAL v Burton Albion Burton enjoy early second-half pressure but it's three-nil just after the hour when their defender Tom Naylor has little time to react to a Can header from a Milner cross and unfortunately diverts the ball over the line. A first 'oggy' of the season in LFC's favour.



STURRIDGE v Burton Albion On 78 minutes the England striker, on as a substitute for Firmino, fires a left-footed shot from close range to the bottom left corner, excellently assisted by Milner who'd collected a Mane pass on the right and slipped a ball across the face of the goal.



STURRIDGE v Burton Albion And it's a double for Daniel as he's set up by Mane to shoot hard and low from 15 yards with seven minutes left on the clock v Buton. Afterwards he simply insists: "We want to win, we always want to win every game, regardless of the competition."









MILNER v Tottenham Hotspur In this Saturday lunchtime showdown James Milner becomes the first Liverpool FC left-back to convert a Premier League penalty since Julian Dicks back in 1994. Incredibly he's now also never lost in the 42 top-flight games in which he's netted!



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FIRMINO v Leicester City Against the defending Prem champions in LFC's first home game of 2016/17, on a sunny day in front of the newly-opened expanded Main Stand, Firmino opens the scoring by finishing with a reverse shot across Foxes keeper Kasper Schmeichel.

MANE v Leicester City Sturridge races towards goal on the half-hour and his slick back-flick finds Mane unmarked but with goalie Schmeichel charging towards him. Sadio's speed enables him to reach the ball first and his deft touch takes it spinning under the crossbar.

LALLANA v Leicester City Thump! The whole ground can hear as well as see this cracking drive from Lallana who benefits from great awareness and a neat lay-off from Wijnaldum in the penalty area before unleashing an unstoppable shot into the net in front of the Kop.

FIRMINO v Leicester City Roberto's second is coolly despatched after Mane has nipped ahead of Schmeichel and squared to his team-mate. It means that since the start of last season (2015/16) Firmino has scored more Premier League goals than any other Liverpool player.



LOVREN v Chelsea Friday-night delight as Lovren scores at Stamford Bridge on 17 minutes. Coutinho is allowed space on the left to whip in a cross that is volleyed into the Chelsea net by the Croatian defender with the kind of technique his striking team-mates would be proud of!

HENDERSON v Chelsea Twenty-five yards out, the skipper intercepts the ball and sets his sights on goal in the same instant. His curling shot is astonishingly exact, beating the outstretched arm of Blues goalie Courtois and nestling under the bar and into the top inside-netting. Wow.

KLAVAN v Derby County This EFL Cup third-round tie at the iPro Stadium is goalless until Coutinho in-swings a corner and the ball ricochets to Klavan, who fires home on the half-volley with his left foot to become the team's 10th different player on the scoresheet in seven games.

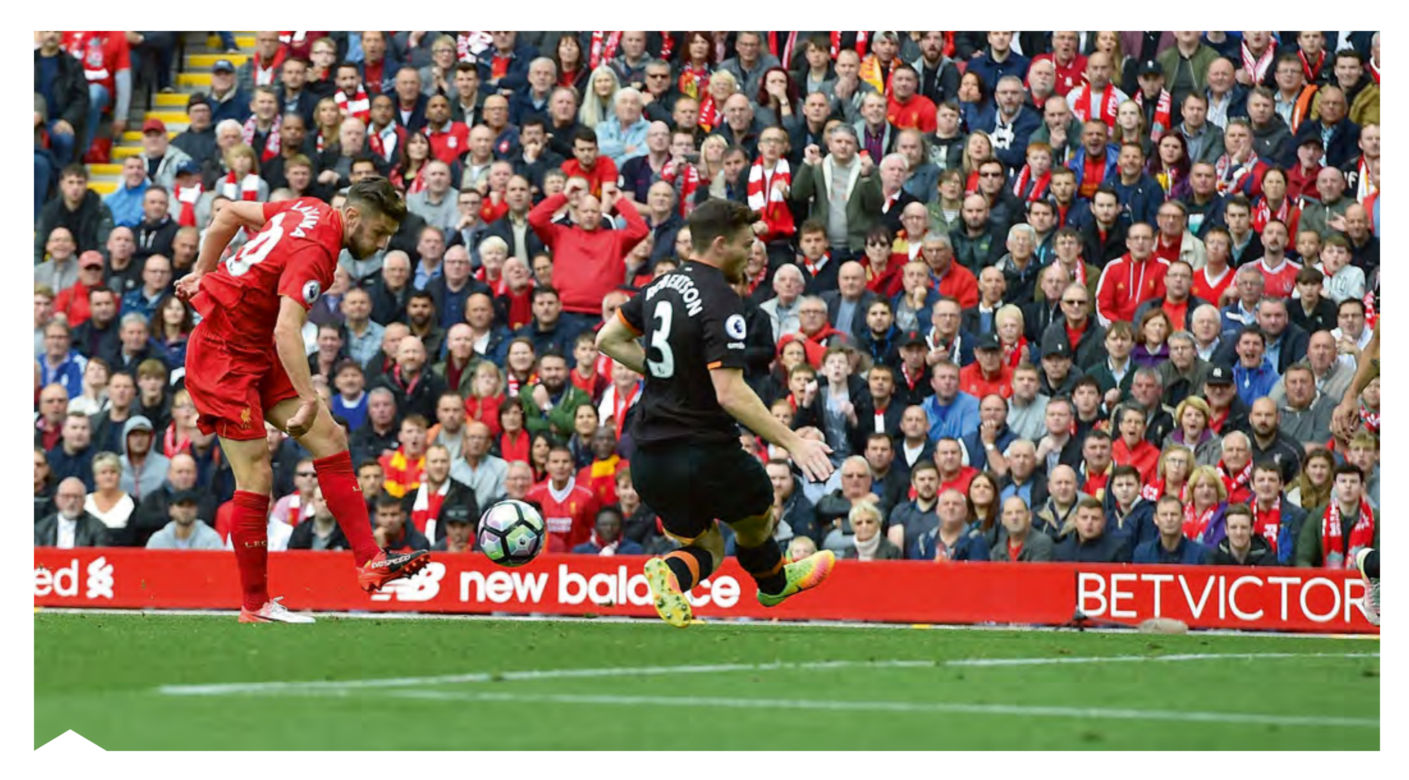


COUTINHO v Derby County Early in the second half the visiting Reds double their advantage folllowing good approach-play between Coutinho and fellow countryman Firmino. The former bursts into the penalty area and shoots into the bottom-left corner of the Derby goal.



ORIGI v Derby County The tie is settled on 54 minutes when Coutinho sets up Origi for goal three against the Rams. The big Belgian breaks into space along the right side of the penalty area and lifts a clinical finish into the roof of the net to send the travelling Kopites back home happy.

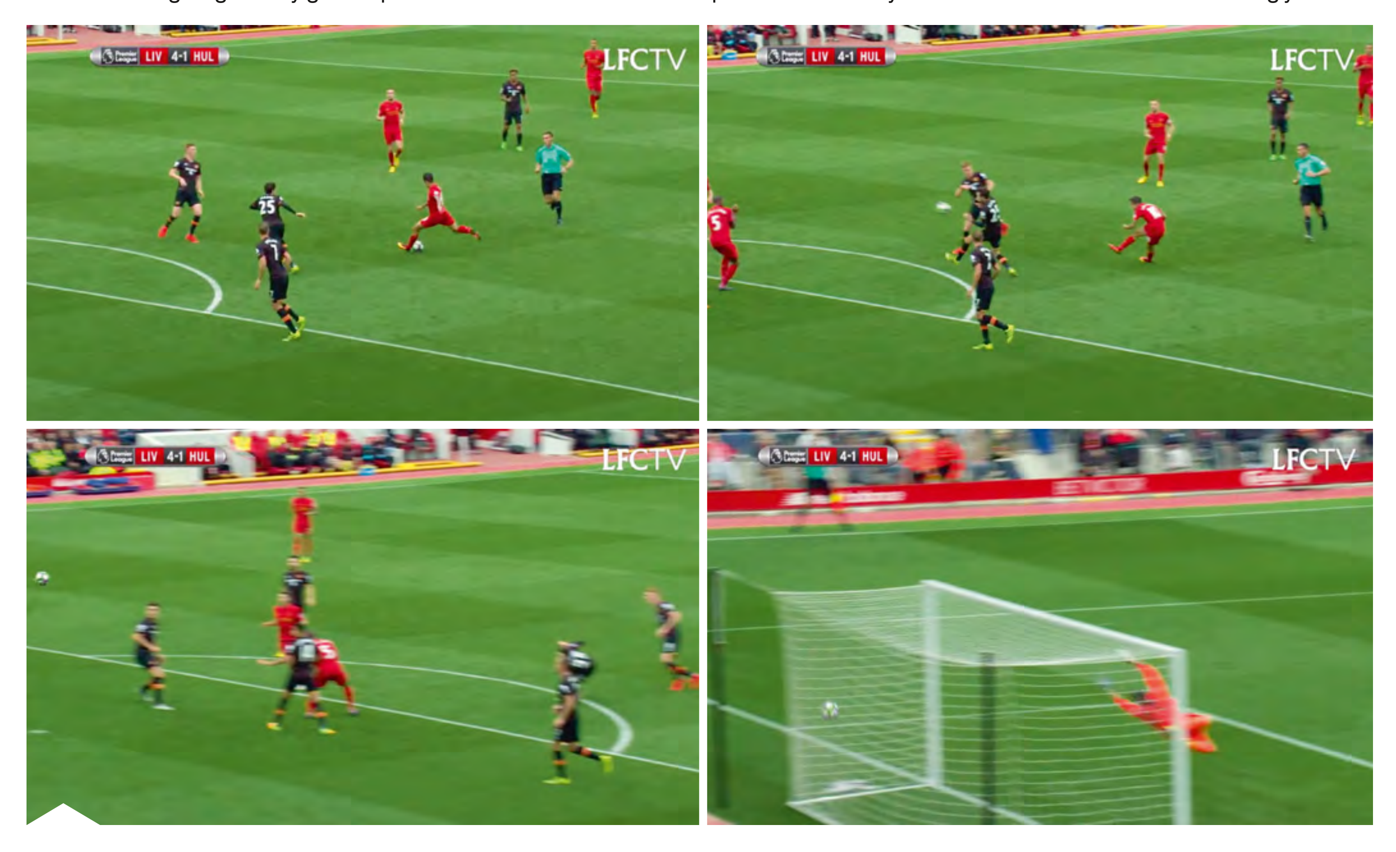




LALLANA v Hull City The Reds are energetic and aggressive from the word go, chasing down Hull's players and scoring the first of five goals through Lallana, who collects a Coutinho pass inside a crowded box and scores with a low left-footed shot into the corner. Anfield erupts, again.

MILNER v Hull City Tigers winger Ahmed Elmohamady is forced to handle the ball on the line, as he attempts to block Coutinho's shot; it leads to his dismissal and the first of Milner's successful spot-kicks on the day. Right-foot shot, bottom-right corner. Liverpool 2 Hull City 0.

MANE v Hull City Lallana wrong-foots his marker, turns, looks up, then pings a precise ball into the path of Mane who is unmarked centrally in front of the Tigers goal. City goalkeeper David Marshall is rooted to the spot as Sadio's daisy-cutter finds the corner of the net unerringly.



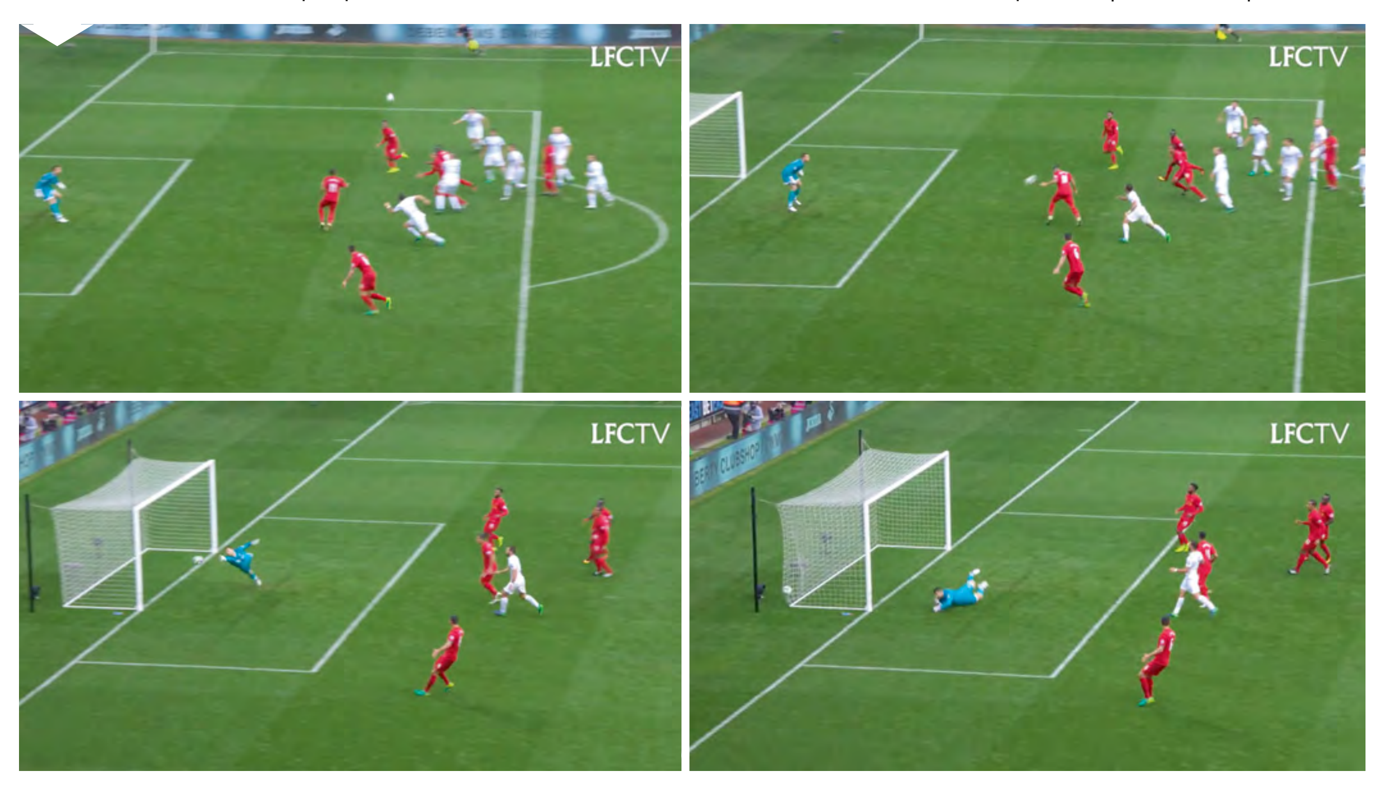
COUTINHO v Hull City The shellshocked Tigers have just pulled one back to make it 3-1 to Liverpool at Anfield: any chance of an implausible comeback? Not when Coutinho receives Lallana's square pass and advances to fire home from 25 yards in front of the jubilant Spion Kop.

MILNER v Hull City On 70 minutes Liverpool substitute Sturridge draws a foul in the penalty area and up steps Milner to take his second spot-kick of the afternoon, this time in front of a hushed, expectant Kop. Right-foot shot, bottom-right corner. Liverpool 5 Hull City 1.




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FIRMINO v Swansea City The Reds are one-down in South Wales as they emerge for the second half at the rain-soaked Liberty Stadium, but on 54 minutes Henderson pumps the ball back into the box after a Swansea clearance and Firmino stoops to conquer with the equaliser.



MILNER v Swansea City Another calmly-converted Milner penalty, this time dinked into the middle of the goal. It's the first time that the Reds have won four consecutive Premier League games under manager Jürgen Klopp and the perfect way to end his first full year at the helm.

MANE v West Brom A brilliant Coutinho dummy frees Emre Can who finds Firmino. The perceptive Brazilian's beautifully-weighted cross is then met on the full by Mane, sweeping home with the instep of his right boot for his fourth goal of the season. Another glorious LFC finish.



COUTINHO v West Brom After 35 minutes Coutinho makes it 2-0 for Liverpool against the Baggies when he picks up the ball from Mane, cuts inside Baggies defender Gareth McAuley and lashes into the bottom corner with the keeper helpless. He's voted man of the match, again.

STURRIDGE v Tottenham Hotspur Dan the man is off the mark nine minutes into this all-Premier League clash in the fourth round of the EFL Cup. It's Marko Grujic who creates the chance, speeding into the area and firing across goal for Sturridge to stab into the roof of the net.

STURRIDGE v Tottenham Hotspur Sturridge to Origi to Wijnaldum to Sturridge again, who springs the Spurs offside trap, sprints through on goal and tucks it away with a touch of class. It takes his overall League Cup tally to ten from his last eight appearances in the competition.

CAN v Crystal Palace It's a first goal of the season for the German midfielder, who gives the Reds the lead at Selhurst Park in this Saturday-evening fixture with an excellent, instinctive left-footed finish on 16 minutes, after a good combination down the left from Coutinho and Moreno.



LOVREN v Crystal Palace Three minutes after Palace equalise, James McArthur taking advantage of a mis-cued Lovren clearance, the Reds central defender makes amends magnificently by heading home Coutinho's corner from close-range to restore Liverpool's advantage.

MATIP v Crystal Palace Three-two on 44 minutes in an absorbing encounter in South London when centre-back Matip gets his debut goal for Liverpool, rising high to power an unstoppable header beyond Eagles goalkeeper Mandanda from Coutinho's outswinging corner.



FIRMINO v Crystal Palace Henderson's sublime ball, Firmino's fabulous finish, over the head of the onrushing goalkeeper. It's the eighth time to date that the Reds have scored four or more in a Premier League game in 2016 and it extends their unbeaten run to 11 games.

MANE v Watford Twenty-seven minutes gone and still no score – is it going to be one of those games? Far from it. A short corner from Milner to Coutinho allows the Liverpool no10 to cross into the box, and Mane's acrobatic glancing header directs the ball into the far corner of the net.

COUTINHO v Watford On the half-hour he takes Firmino's through-ball, cuts into the 'D' and shoots hard and low past keeper Gomes. Later leaves to a standing ovation.





CAN v Watford A second goal for Can in as many matches. Before half-time he heads home Lallana's cross from the right after another lightning-fast Liverpool raid. The German international makes it look easy but it takes precision to score.



FIRMINO v Watford Second half, Kop end, and Firmino's graceful right-footed shot from very close-range is on target, assisted by Lallana with a low, driven cross following a Reds set-piece situation. A simple finish which puts Liverpool 4-0 up with half-an-hour still to play.



MANE v Watford Sixty minutes gone and it's a second of the afternoon for the Senegal ace. This time Firmino darts into space and holds off a challenge inside the area before taking his time and crossing low for Mane to hook into the net first-time from inside the six-yard box.



WIJNALDUM v Watford Thirteen minutes after the Hornets pull one back – and following a fine Sturridge effort off the bar – it's 6-1 when Wijnaldum reacts to a rebound to drill in his first LFC goal. The Reds are now the top flight's highest scorers with 30 goals from 11 matches.

ORIGI v Sunderland Fifteen minutes left on the clock and still no goals against a stubborn Sunderland side at Anfield. Enter substitute Origi, creating space on the left-hand side of the box with a series of step-overs then curling one into the far corner. And yes, he definitely meant it.

MILNER v Sunderland When the nerves are frayed and there's a pen to take…who you gonna call? The vice-captain, of course. With ice in his veins, James Milner steps up to convert the spot-kick in front of the Kop to seal victory and send Liverpool back to the top of the Prem table.





ORIGI v Leeds United Three days after his goal against Sunderland it's Divock who breaks the deadlock again, this time in a hard-fought EFL Cup quarter-final with the team from West Yorkshire. It's a smart sliding finish at the near post from a brilliant cross by Trent Alexander-Arnold.

LFCTV

WOODBURN v Leeds United With nine minutes left, brilliant play from Mane, Origi and Wijnaldum sets up Woodburn, aged only 17 years and 45 days, to hook home at the far post in front of the Kop and confirm Liverpool's progress to a third consecutive League Cup semi-final.

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MANE v Bournemouth It's the best possible start on the South Coast as Can's brilliant pass over the top picks out Mane's run inside from the right. He outpaces Nathan Ake to beat the Cherries defender to the ball before just managing to touch it beyond home goalkeeper Boruc.



ORIGI v Bournemouth Two goals in as many minutes. This time Henderson sprays it down the right for Origi to chase. He gets there before the goalie but he still has an awful lot to do from a very difficult angle. Result: a brilliantly curled finish into the unguarded goal. World-class.



CAN v Bournemouth Liverpool's two-goal cushion over their hosts is restored with a thumper from Can. It owes much to Mane, who wins the ball back before speeding into the box and cutting it back for Can on the edge of the area, who finds the top corner with the perfect side-footer.

LALLANA v West Ham United Having lost the toss the Reds are attacking the Kop in the first half and just five minutes are on the clock when Lallana gives Liverpool the lead with a smart left-footed finish, controlling Sadio Mane's cross and driving low past goalkeeper Darren Randolph.

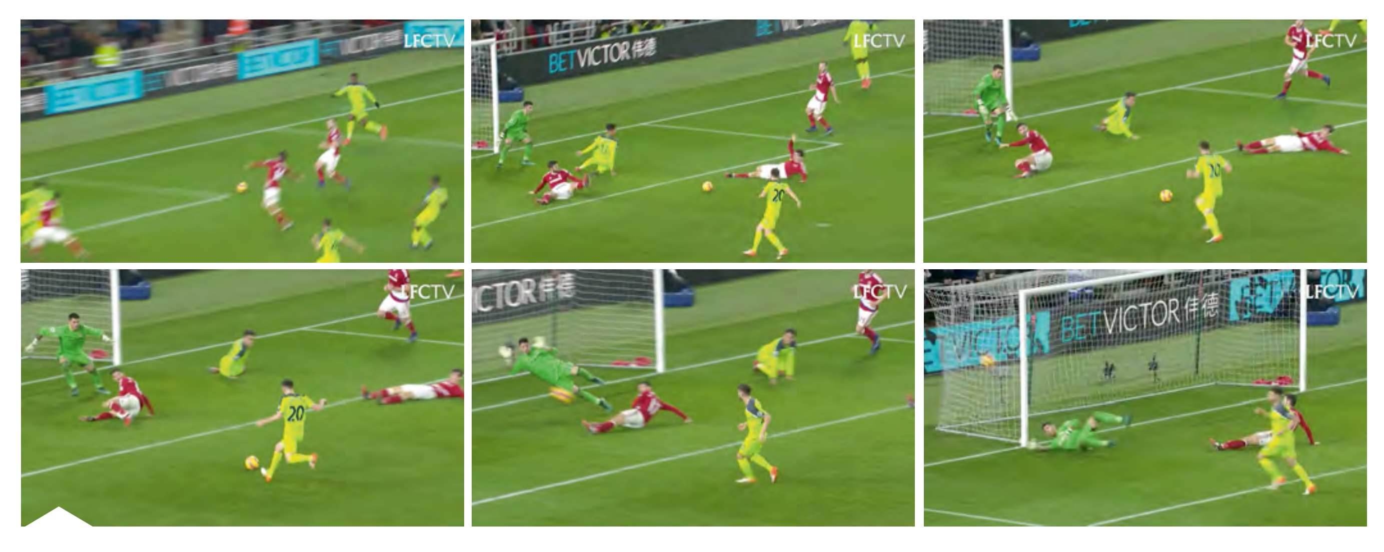
ORIGI v West Ham United Three minutes after the interval Liverpool are level when Randolph can't deal with Mane's cross and Origi is on hand to touch home from close range. That makes it four goals in his last four games for the Belgian striker, and another soon to come at Boro…



LALLANA v Middlesborough Adam directs a fine back-post header from Nathanial Clyne's cross into the net – it's the first time one English player has assisted another for Liverpool this season and means Lallana has both scored and assisted a goal in three PL games in 2016/17.



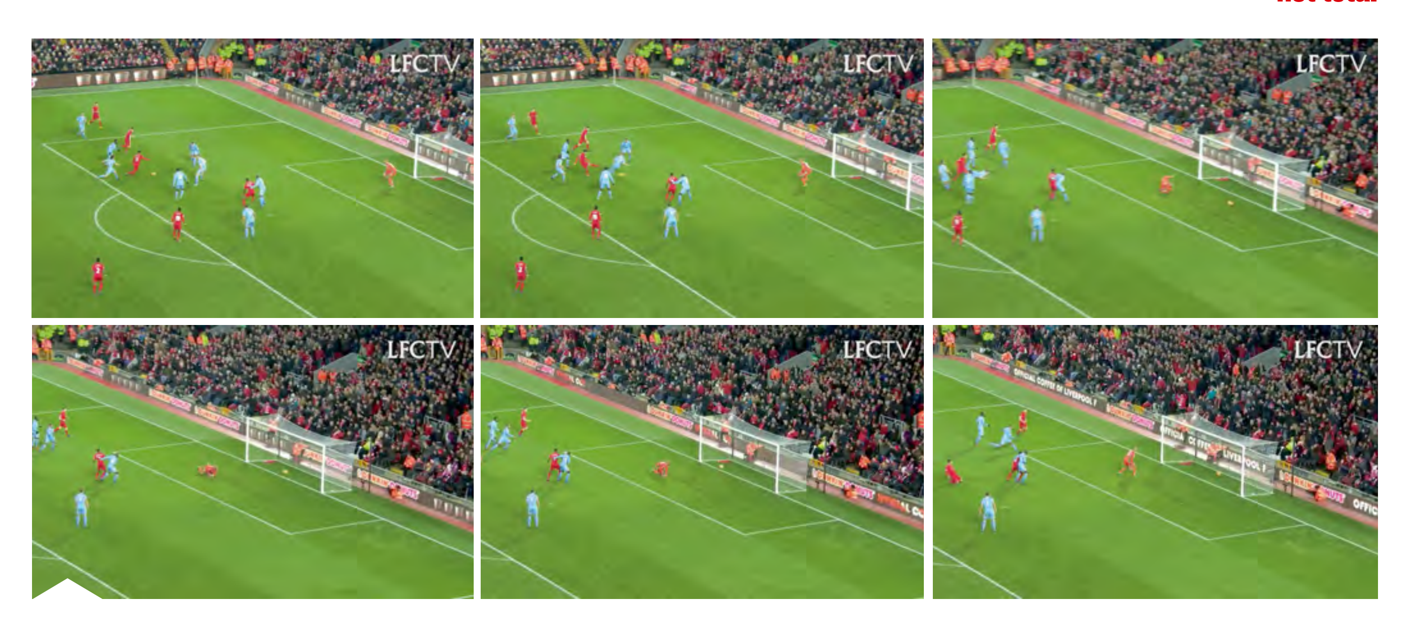
ORIGI v Middlesborough On the hour-mark the Reds go two-up at the Riverside when Origi sweeps the ball past Boro goalkeeper Victor Valdes. It comes from a fluid move down the right channel involving Mane, Firmino, Wijnaldum and finally Lallana who crosses fast and low.



LALLANA v Middlesborough Eight minutes later the roles are reversed as Origi breaks to cross from the right and Lallana finishes superbly with his left foot. It secures a first success at the Riverside Stadium since March 2002, ending a run of seven Liverpool visits without a victory.

MANE v Everton Goodison Park, Monday 19 December 2016, ninety-four minutes and counting… Substitute Daniel Sturridge collects the ball, dances across the penalty area and fires against the post, and the quickest to react is Sadio Mane who pokes in the rebound to Kopite delight.

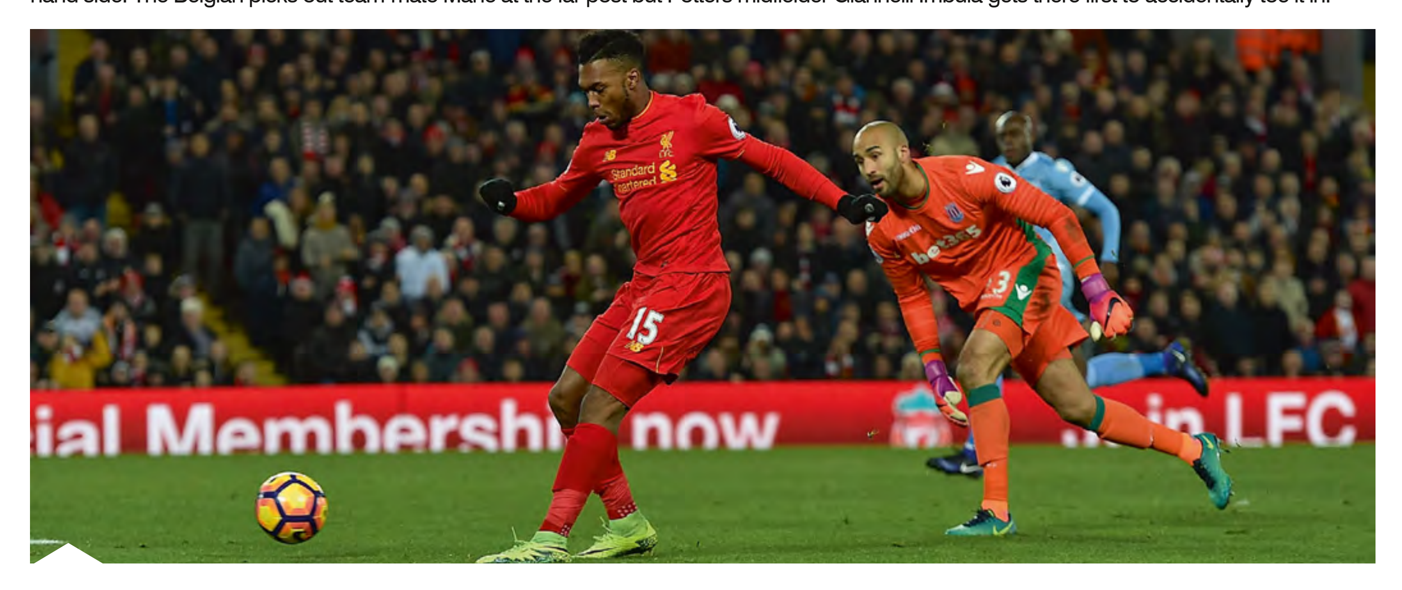
LALLANA v Stoke City Another first half attacking the Kop end sees the Reds go behind before a brilliant ball out-wide from Origi gets Mane into a one-on-one situation and allows him to feed Lallana in the box. Adam smashes the ball into the net at the near-post at the second attempt.



FIRMINO v Stoke City The no11 puts Liverpool ahead just before half-time when tight, intricate play between Lallana and Milner on the left edge of the Stoke penalty area sees Roberto receive a short pass, turn quickly and strike low with his left foot into the Potters net off both posts.



OWN-GOAL v Stoke City A poor Stoke clearance allows Henderson to charge at the back-four and he releases Origi into the box on the left-hand side. The Belgian picks out team-mate Mane at the far post but Potters midfielder Giannelli Imbula gets there first to accidentally toe it in.



STURRIDGE v Stoke City The England striker has only been on the pitch for a few seconds (as a sub for Origi) when he nets his first Premier League goal of the season, anticipating a blind back-pass to find himself one-on-one with Stoke keeper Lee Grant, then shimmy and steer home.

WIJNALDUM v Manchester City Eight minutes into this New Year's Eve clash of titans, it's Liverpool who break the deadlock. Lallana flights a cross from the left flank into the area and Gini soars high and meets it perfectly, heading powerfully past Cladio Bravo into the bottom corner.



STURRIDGE v Sunderland Home keeper Vito Mannone has already thwarted Sturridge once, but this time the Reds ace, on his return to the Liverpool starting XI, reacts first to team-mate Lovren's bouncing volley to instinctively guide a header over the goalie and into the Sunderland net.

MANE v Sunderland Liverpool have the lead once again as Moreno's corner from the right flicks off the head of centre-half Djilobodji and rolls for Mane, who taps in from inside the six-yard box. That makes sixty LFC goals in all competitions in season 2016/17…and many more to come!

THE LION OF TERANGA

Ahead of his Africa Cup of Nations assignment Reds ace Sadio Mane reveals why winning with Senegal would mean everything

Sadio Mane is set to spend most of this month in Gabon as he bids to help Senegal win the Africa Cup of Nations for the first time. The nearest the team known as the 'Lions of Teranga' have come to landing the trophy was back in early 2002 when they fell at the final hurdle, losing on penalties to Cameroon after a goalless draw in the showpiece fixture in Mali.

'Teranga' is a Senegalese term denoting the country's proud tradition of hospitality, but in that final played 15 years ago they were too charitable in the shoot-out.

Former Middlesbrough midfielder Geremi scored what proved to be the decisive goal for Cameroon after Senegal's El-Hadji Diouf had missed his kick. Current Senegal manager Aliou Cisse, who went on to wear the blue of both Birmingham City and Portsmouth, then failed from 12 yards after ex-Reds defender Rigobert Song had also been unable to convert from the spot.

That national team, though, was an inspiration to Mane, then nine years old, and they would capture the imagination of the globe by reaching the quarter-finals of that summer's World Cup finals in Korea and Japan, having beaten reigning champions France 1-0 in the opening game. The performances of Diouf would convince Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier to splash out £10 million to bring him to Anfield ahead of the following season, while his team-mate Salif Diao was also snapped up by the Frenchman.

Diouf's skills made a significant impression on Mane. "When I was



younger he was one of my heroes, especially because he was playing for Liverpool," he admits.

"That was a big motivation for me. I liked the way he played and his range of skills. He was a great player for the national team and one of the key players for Senegal.

"My other big hero back then was Ronaldinho. I liked the way he played



"WE'VE GOT GOOD ACADEMIES IN SENEGAL DOING A VERY GOOD JOB IN DEVELOPING YOUNG PLAYERS"

football with such a big smile on his face. For me, he is the greatest player that I have ever watched. What did I like so much about him? Many things. How he controlled the ball, how he took free-kicks, his dribbling skills...the whole package, it was just fantastic."

Diouf and Diao helped blaze a trail for Senegalese stars to play in the Premier League. They are two of 34 players to have operated in England's top flight and Mane says he is privileged to be in that number. "There are many Senegalese players playing in England, and we have some academies in the country doing a very good job in developing young players to a good technical standard to help them achieve their dreams of playing in the top European leagues, especially in England. That is very good for football in Senegal.

"Personally it was my dream to play in England. I think Premier League football has made a big impact on Senegal. It's the biggest league in the world so hopefully there will be more African players and Senegalese players that come through and play in this league in the future."

After growing up playing street football back home Mane now hopes to be a role-model himself to thousands of young boys playing football in the nation.

"I can't remember a time when I wasn't playing football. I think I have been playing the game since birth! From as long ago as I can remember, I had nothing but football in my head. I think I was two or three years old when I started to play. Football was in my soul.

"When I signed here at Liverpool I was very happy. There weren't too many clubs calling but, in my head it was always Liverpool, Liverpool. So when I signed for the club I was extremely happy."

After representing Senegal's Under-23s he made his full international debut in 2012. He will be hoping his second experience of the Africa Cup of Nations will be better than his first, which proved to be a frustrating affair. Halfway through his debut season in



In action for Senegal at the 2012 Olympics

the Premier League with Southampton, the attacker was named in Alain Giresse's squad for the tournament but had to withdraw after limping out of a 2-0 win over Arsenal – a game in which he scored – on New Year's Day 2015.

The injury forced him to miss Senegal's opening group game against Ghana, a 2-1 win, but he rejoined the squad in time to start in the 1-1 draw against South Africa four days later. He also lined-up from the start in the final group fixture against Algeria, but he and his team-mates were kept at bay by ex-Reds defender Carl Medjani and co. A 2-0 win for Algeria, with goals from Riyad Mahrez and Nabil Bentaleb, meant Senegal finished third in the group behind Ghana and Algeria and so failed to progress to the knockout stages.

Senegal will come up against Algeria again this time around with Tunisia and Zimbabwe also drawn in their group. They will play all three games in the 22,000-capacity Stade de Franceville. The final will be played in Libreville on Sunday 5 February.

Capped 36 times, Sadio has 10 goals and 11 assists for his country. His phenomenal 2016 saw him nominated for the BBC's African Player of the Year award for the second successive year. A combination of silky skills, close control, passing and pace, plus his ability to play wide or down the middle and his eye for an assist and a goal, has won him many admirers.

"I WAS FULL OF BELIEF THAT I COULD BE A FOOTBALLER; I JUST HAD TO WORK HARD"

Mady Toure, the founder of the Dakar-based Academie Generation Foot where Mane began his football education, told BBC Sport recently: "Sadio Mane has something that even Lionel Messi doesn't have, something that even Neymar doesn't have."

A Senegal success at the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations would also be a particularly proud moment for Sadio's mother, who took a while to accept that he had achieved his dream of becoming a Premier League footballer.

"She believes it now!" he says. "I talked to her recently and she is very happy for me. She is very proud of me and I am very happy to be a football player. At the beginning it was not easy and they [his parents] did not push me because I don't think they really believed that being a footballer was something that I could achieve. I think they thought there was no chance for me to play as a professional.

"I remember sometimes I did not go to school so that I could play football with my friends instead. Every time I went back home I would be in trouble with my parents. I remember going to one of my dad's friends and he spoke to my mum and my uncle and just said: 'He is young, you have to understand him, he really wants to be a football player'.

"I was full of belief in myself that I could be a footballer, I just had no idea how to achieve it! I knew I just had to do my best and work hard. In the end, my family tried to help me and push me and today I am a football player."

2017 CUP OF NATIONS

Taking place over three weeks between 14 January and 5 February, the tournament celebrates its 60th anniversary and will be known as the Total Africa Cup of Nations. It was originally due to take place in Libya until the Confederation of African Football (CAF) switched the event to Gabon and its four cities of Libreville, Franceville, Oyem and Port Gentil. Sixteen teams will compete, including reigning champions Ivory Coast. The final is at the Stade de l'Amitie in Libreville on Sunday 5 February.



The trophy and Senegal boss Aliou Cisse

words William Hughes


Salif Diao

Anfield's African internationals

CARL MEDJANI (Algeria): defender now playing for Spanish second-tier side Leganes; never made a first-team app for the Reds but he's been capped over 50 times and helped Algeria reach the last eight in 2015.

CHARLES ITANDJE (Cameroon): French-born keeper who appeared for the Indomitable Lions in the 2014 World Cup finals; currently plays in the Turkish Super Lig for Gaziantepspor.

JOEL MATIP (Cameroon): first called up by Cameroon in 2009 but won't be in Gabon. "It's not an easy decision but I want to concentrate on Liverpool."

RIGOBERT SONG (Cameroon): played 38 times for the Reds between 1999 and 2000; an international for 17 years, winning 137 caps and appearing in a record eight African Cup of Nations; recovering from a stroke.

TITI CAMARA (Guinea): played 37 times for LFC, scoring 10 goals during 1999/00; represented Guinea at the 2004 Africa Nations Cup, scoring three goals.

KOLO TOURE (Ivory Coast): won 120 caps and helped his country to victory in the 2015 finals in Equatorial Guinea, scoring in the penalty shootout against Ghana.

MOMO SISSOKO (Mali): defensive midfielder who played 87 times for the Reds between 2005 and 2007; received his first international call-up in 2004.

DJIMI TRAORE (Mali): a 2005 Champions League winner who made 141 apps for LFC; won six caps for Mali between 2004-06 but never played in a Nations Cup.

OUSSAMA ASSAIDI (Morocco): winger most recently at Al-Ahli Dubai, he scored his first international goal in an Africa Cup of Nations qualifier against Algeria in 2011.

NABIL EL ZHAR (Morocco): currently playing at Las Palmas and yet to figure in a Nations Cup tournament.

VICTOR MOSES (Nigeria): now back at Chelsea, he played on-loan for the Reds in 2013/14 and appeared for the triumphant Nigeria side in the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations.

EL-HADJI DIOUF (Senegal): star of Senegal's 2002 World Cup campaign, he also appeared at that year's Africa Cup of Nations; twice named African Footballer of the Year.

SALIF DIAO (Senegal): midfielder who was a runner-up with Senegal in the 2002 Africa Cup of Nations and also played in the 2004 tournament.

SADIO MANE (Senegal): initially ruled out of the squad for the 2015 finals but recovered from injury to figure twice in Senegal's group-stage exit.

BRUCE GROBBELAAR (Zimbabwe): won 33 caps for Zimbabwe between 1977 and 1998 but never appeared at a Nations Cup final tournament.

GORDON HODGSON, ARTHUR RILEY & DOUG RUDHAM (all South Africa): the trio played in the 1920s and 30s, long before the Cup of Nations was first contested in 1957; goalscoring ace Hodgson actually won caps for both South Africa and England during his career.



EC DOES IT

Liverpool FC's young centurion Emre Can won't get too carried away but he knows that this Reds team has the potential to achieve great, great things



Sometimes the shortest answers are the most telling. It's the day after Liverpool's 4-1 Premier League victory against Stoke City and I'm sat inside Melwood with Emre Can chatting about the past, present and future. The subject turns towards his aspirations for 2017 and his response is concise to say the least. "Stay healthy. Win trophies."

Two clear objectives, and both for understandable reasons. After an injury-free 2015 and only a short-term absence with a foot problem in April, the German international midfielder has had to deal with foot and knee injuries in the second half of 2016. Both have kept Emre on the sidelines for longer than he would have liked and explain why 'staying healthy' is top of his list for 2017.

"I think 2016 was quite a good year for me. I believe I stepped forward again, but the first half of the year was better than the second half of the year because I have had two injuries.

"This season I have not played too much and my target is to play always, but it is difficult to do this if you are injured. When I am fit and healthy, always playing is my priority and I am confident enough to know I will play a lot of games."

Assessing 2016 for Liverpool FC is a tricky business. The Reds ended the year in the thick of the title race having developed a style of play under Jürgen Klopp that leads to goals, goals, goals. Earlier in the year they reached both the League Cup and Europa League finals with thrilling nights such as the 4-3 Anfield comeback against Borussia Dortmund along the way.

However, when all is said and done, history will show that Liverpool won nothing in 2016 and that Emre Can ended it without a winner's medal despite reaching a third semi-final with Germany at Euro 2016. Even so, when I enquire about his personal 2016 highlights, those big games are at the forefront of his mind.

"Dortmund. Villarreal, and, of course, playing in the Europa League final against Sevilla all stand out. We lost that final, but the Europa League final was a big game for me to play in for Liverpool.

"Also, not to forget the European Championships semi-final I played in for Germany against France. It was an amazing feeling to be out there on the pitch in that game. I hadn't played at all in the Euros before that – I was always on the bench – but I trained very well when we were in France and the manager [Joachim Löw] saw that and gave me a chance to play. I was in the starting XI against the French and it was unlucky that we didn't win."

Germany's 2-0 defeat to France in Marseille prevented Emre from appearing in his third final of 2016. He was Liverpool's only penalty shoot-out scorer in the League Cup final defeat to Manchester City on spot-kicks at Wembley and played for the full 90 minutes as the Reds slipped to a 3-1 Europa League final defeat to Sevilla in Basel. Such disappointments can haunt some clubs and players, but at Liverpool those final-hurdle falls are being used as motivation to go one better in the future.


Euro 2016 action v France last summer

"WHEN I'M FIT AND HEALTHY, ALWAYS PLAYING IS MY PRIORITY PLUS TRYING TO WIN TROPHIES"

"Yes, it makes us more motivated because we know the feeling of losing in cup finals so now we want the nice feeling of winning them," says Emre. "I hope, and I think, that we will win the next final we are in.

"Every year I have been here we have made the League Cup semi-final. In 2015 it was Chelsea and we lost. In 2016 it was against Stoke City and we made the final but lost on penalties. Now it is another semi-final against Southampton so it makes sense to go on and win it! This is our aim, of course."

Liverpool beat Southampton 6-1 in the League Cup quarter-final at St Mary's last season but after dismissing that as "different season, different teams," Can admits that he is anticipating a difficult encounter against Saints over the two legs.

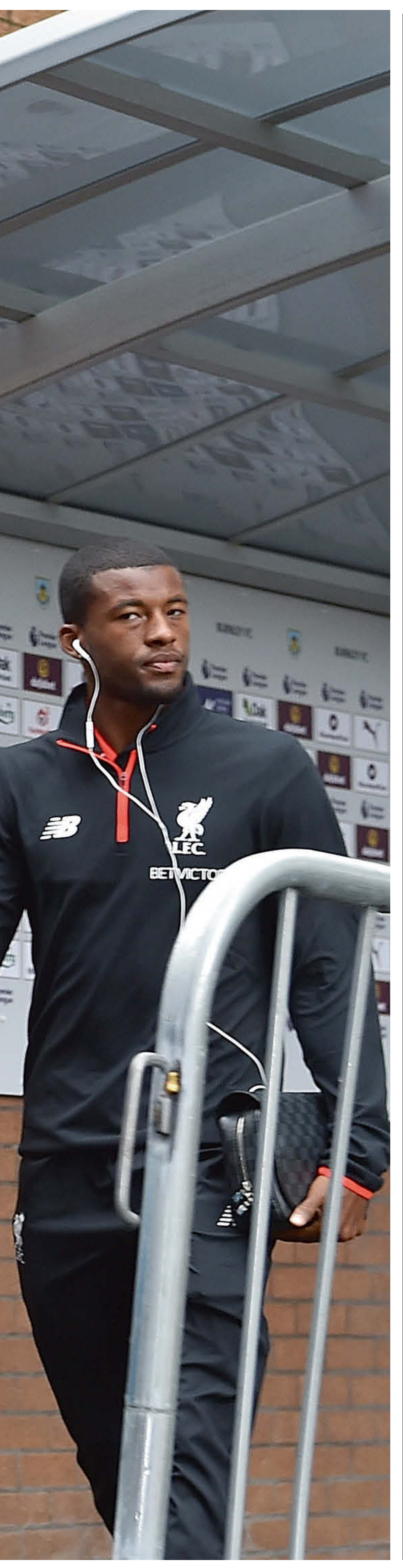
"I know that from our game against them this season in the Premier League, Southampton will be a very tough opponent to play. They are a really good team – a very strong side – and I think it wasn't our best game when we drew 0-0 there. But we know we can do better and our target is to win both games and go to the final.

"I prefer to play at home second because if you go to extra-time or penalties it is always better to be at home with your fans behind you to help you win the game."




23
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Late training session at Melwood

“SADIO WILL BE MISSED BUT WE HAVE OTHER GOOD PLAYERS WHO CAN HELP THE TEAM”

The man who opened the scoring for Southampton in that 6-1 victory back in December 2015 – Sadio Mane – won’t get the chance to face his former club in either game due to his participation in the Africa Cup of Nations for Senegal. With other big Premier League games against Manchester United and Chelsea also coming thick and fast in January, Emre admits the pacy attacker will be missed, but feels Liverpool can cope in his absence.

“Of course he will be a big loss because Sadio is a big, big player for us. He can always score a goal and he gives a lot for the team, but we know we have good players on the bench.

“I think they can bring something to the games that Sadio will miss when he is away and we will continue without him as a team.”

The immediacy at which Mane has slotted into the Liverpool side has been impressive and Emre feels the fact he already had Premier League experience before his big-money Anfield move was crucial to his quick start in a red shirt. “For Sadio it was good to have already played in the Premier League with Southampton before he came to Liverpool. He knew the football here in England and that is why it hasn’t taken any time for him to settle in here.

“It is different when you first arrive here from another country. The leagues are different, the football is different and there is a different style to try to play in. Sadio has done very well, but it would’ve been more difficult for him had he come straight here from another country.”

Emre arrived from Germany in July 2014 at the age of just 20. Two years and four months later he clocked up his 100th Liverpool appearance in the aforementioned 0-0 draw at Southampton. He’s one of 204 players – Alberto Moreno being the latest – to reach a century of games for Liverpool Football Club and it’s a milestone that makes him smile when I mention it.

“Yeah, I’m proud about that. I’m 22 years old and now I have played over 100 games for Liverpool. It’s a nice





feeling and I hope there are more hundreds to come! I didn't think about how many games I would play for Liverpool when I first came here. My target is always to play, but I didn't know what would happen or how often I would play at the start.

"On one hand I think I could've played even more games by now because of the injuries I've had, but on the other hand over 100 games in two-and-a-half years at Liverpool is quite a lot of games. So maybe I could have played more, but I am proud to have played over 100 games here."

A century of games is one thing, but trophies and medals are another. Winning the Premier League is what every Kopite wants in 2017, but with Antonio Conte's Chelsea setting quite a pace the big question now is can Liverpool catch them?

"I don't know. Chelsea are a very strong side and Conte is doing very, very well so all we can do is look after ourselves and get points, points, points. We don't have to keep looking at Chelsea, but they will drop points. When they do, then we have to be ready to take advantage.

"Chelsea come to Anfield on 31 January and we know that will be a very, very big game – one I am very much looking forward to already – but as we sit here now this game is still a long way away and we have a lot of football to play before they are at Anfield.

"It is normal to have it [the league table] in mind and look towards other teams but, really, the most important thing is to look after yourself and your own results. We have to win games, win games, win games. It is only halfway through the season so there are quite a lot of games to play and a lot of points to win, but we know this is a very important period of the season.

"We must keep the momentum going, keep our performances going and all stick together – including the fans – to see what we can do in 2017."

As he has already said, 'winning trophies' is an aspiration for Emre, who turns 23 on 12 January, and getting that first medal as a Liverpool player would be a big deal for him. "It would mean a lot to win something here. Liverpool haven't won a trophy for what, three years? Four years?"

Words: Chris McLoughlin

"MAYBE I COULD HAVE PLAYED MORE BUT I'M PROUD TO HAVE PLAYED 100 GAMES FOR LFC"

I tell him that the last piece of silverware to return to Merseyside was the League Cup in 2012. "Five years without a trophy is too long for Liverpool so it would be nice for us to change that."

Then, with a focused stare and his voice dropping to the kind of whisper that makes you listen all the more intently, Emre gives a glimpse into the psyche inside the dressing-room.

"Our generation could write history here. We know that. Liverpool has never won the Premier League and that makes it interesting! But it is not just the Premier League we are looking at. We have the League Cup semi-final and also the FA Cup as well so we are trying to win what we can win.

"My targets for 2017 are to stay healthy – that is the most important thing – and to play as many games as possible. But I also want to win trophies with this team."



With compatriot Loris Karius

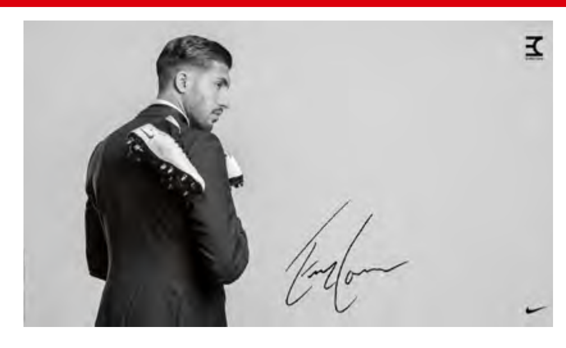
EMRE ONLINE

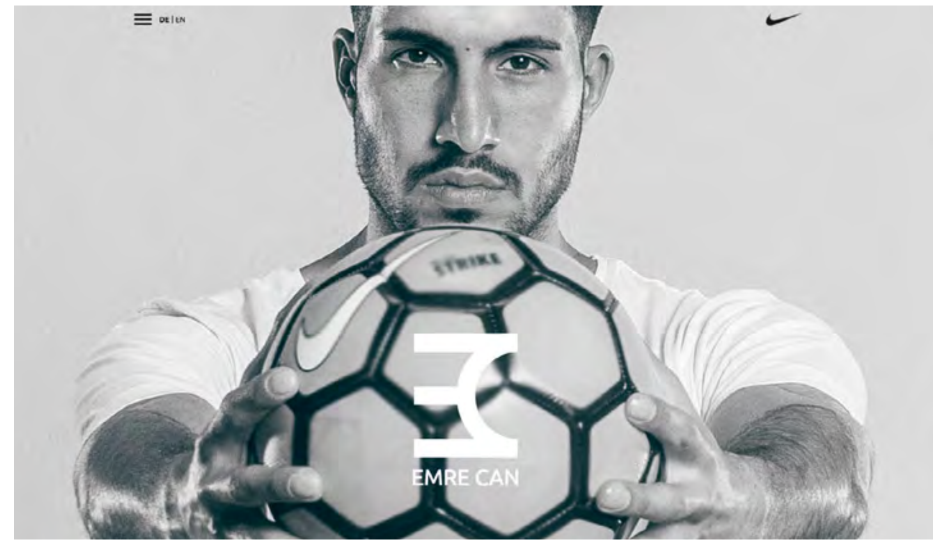
Don't be putting this magazine down just yet, but when you do there's every chance the next thing you pick up will be a smartphone. At least Emre Can hopes you will, as the Reds midfielder has a new website he'd like you to see.

Emre is part of the social-media generation – his Instagram account has over a million followers and he's got almost three times as many Facebook likes as one current Premier League club.

But last month he launched a BRAND new venture into cyberspace: emrecan.com. Have a browse and you'll find a rather slick website featuring an extensive biography of the German international's career, exclusive photography of Emre out and about in downtown Liverpool and even wallpaper (not the stuff from B&Q) to download.

"I set the website up for anyone who wants to know about me. They can read my story, about who I am, about my career and where I have come from.





"They will also know what they are reading has come from me. It took quite a long time to get the website up, but my agent and the companies involved have done a very good bit of work and I like it.

"I have my own 'EC' logo. There were different options to choose from, but I preferred the design of the one I've picked.

"I like to use social media and of course I am on Instagram and Facebook, but this website is more about my personal story and I hope the fans will like it."

LIVERP

When Northern Irish part-timers Crusaders were paired with champions of England and UEFA Cup holders Liverpool in the first round of the European Cup, manager Billy Johnston had a plan.

He phoned fellow Ulsterman Billy Bingham, who just happened to be the manager of Everton, for tactical advice ahead of the first leg at Anfield. “We’ve got to be sponges, soak up what Liverpool throw at us and hope they have bad luck with their finishing.”

The Northern Ireland champions were a mixture of civil servants, dockers and salesmen, but Liverpool boss Bob Paisley wasn’t taking anything for granted. “People have written off Crusaders saying they are just a bunch of tailors and butchers,” he told the *Liverpool Echo*. “Well, they’re probably good tailors and butchers and we respect them as much as anyone. I’ve ordered no mickey-taking.”

Paisley was right to be wary. It was the first time the Reds had faced a team from Northern Ireland and, in front of a modest crowd of 22,242 at Anfield, the visitors defended heroically with Roy McDonald – insurance salesman by day, goalkeeper by night – producing a string of fine saves to limit Liverpool to a 2-0 victory.

Phil Neal converted a dubious 18th-minute penalty to put Paisley’s men ahead before John Toshack headed in Stevie Heighway’s 64th-minute cross to complete the win. “I hear one of their players lost a contact lens?” quipped Paisley afterwards. “He’s got a good chance of finding it as there’s only two places it can be – the two penalty areas!”

“You’re in for a hell of a game across the water,” responded Crusaders boss Johnson, who then invited legendary Northern Ireland manager Danny Blanchflower to give his side a pep-talk before the second leg.

UEFA allowed Liverpool to travel to Belfast on the day of the game to avoid any potential security risks an overnight stay may have caused in the troubled province of the time, and the Reds could’ve been in trouble early on. A crowd of 10,500 inside Seaview saw the home side’s Ronnie McAteer


John Toshack challenges in the first leg at Anfield

“PEOPLE HAVE WRITTEN THEM OFF BUT WE RESPECT THEM AS MUCH AS ANYONE”

A new series celebrating the 40th anniversary of our first European Cup win of 1977 and starting with round one…

OOL IRISH

hit the bar and post in the opening 15 minutes before Liverpool seized control of the game with Kevin Keegan running through to net a 34th-minute opener.

With 10 minutes to go, and following the introduction of Terry McDermott from the bench, Crusaders finally capitulated. David Johnson tapped in an 84th-minute second after Heighway's shot had been parried; McDermott drove home three minutes later after cutting in from the left; and Heighway made it four after Johnson's shot was saved by McDonald.

Johnson sealed a 5-0 win by heading home Keegan's corner in the 90th minute and Paisley was full of praise for the gallant hosts: "Crusaders were a credit to their game. After all, they're only part-timers but they defended well until they tired. It's been a great experience playing here."

Next stop on the road to Rome? Turkey, to face Trazbonspor...

FIRST ROUND FIRST LEG
14 SEPTEMBER 1976
LIVERPOOL 2 CRUSADERS 0
Goals: Neal (18pen), Toshack (64). Clemence, Neal, Jones, Smith, Kennedy, Hughes, Keegan, Johnson, Heighway, Toshack, Callaghan. Subs: McDonnell, Kettle, Case, McDermott, Fairclough.

FIRST ROUND SECOND LEG
28 SEPTEMBER 1976
CRUSADERS 0 LIVERPOOL 5
Goals: Keegan (34), Johnson (81, 90), McDermott (84), Heighway (87). Clemence, Neal, Jones, Smith, Kennedy, Hughes, Keegan, Johnson, Heighway, Case (McDermott 63), Callaghan. Subs: McDonnell, Thompson, Fairclough, Waddle.


Crusaders keeper Roy McDonald


Tosh again, this time heading at goal

Be the first to catch a sneak preview.

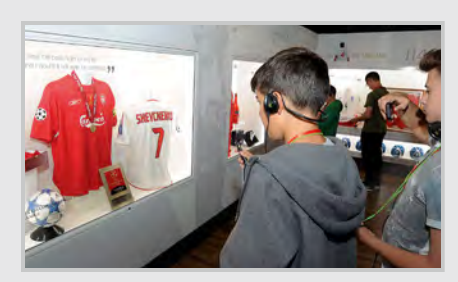
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Neil Mellor

We need to stay focused on the next game, but the title race is on

Liverpool are entering the most important period of the season. Between 11 January and 11 February the Reds play Manchester United, Chelsea and Tottenham in the Premier League plus League Cup semi-finals against Southampton.

This busy period could be absolutely crucial in defining how Liverpool's season goes, but the way we have performed against the top sides encourages me to think that we can do very well from a tough run of games.

Chelsea have not won the Premier League already. Any of the clubs currently in the top six can still be crowned champions in May. There are a lot of games still to play, lots of quality in all those squads and every team will drop points as the season progresses.

If Eden Hazard or Diego Costa are missing for any length of time then I would expect Chelsea to start slipping up. You have to give Antonio Conte credit for the form they've been in, but football is hard to predict and just because a team is playing well now doesn't mean they'll still be performing well in the spring.

Liverpool won at Stamford Bridge in September and we've also beaten Arsenal and Manchester City. Yes, it wasn't ideal to drop points at Burnley, Bournemouth and Sunderland, but it is more valuable to take points against your direct rivals. Liverpool versus Chelsea at Anfield on 31 January can effectively be worth six points and ultimately make a huge difference in the season.

This can be an energy-sapping time, though, and the way Liverpool play under Jürgen Klopp is both physically and mentally demanding for the players. It has always been tradition to play a lot of games over Christmas and in January, but maybe it should be looked at now as the closeness of the fixtures has an impact. One congestion-easing idea would be to play the League Cup semi-final as a one-off game at a neutral venue rather than over two legs. I wouldn't be opposed to that at all, although it would break with tradition.

"ANY OF THOSE CLUBS IN THE TOP SIX CAN STILL BE CROWNED CHAMPIONS COME MAY"

Of course you've got to be in the League Cup semi-final for it to be an issue and because Liverpool have reached the last four again then the competition becomes a bigger priority. What stage of a competition you reach determines how important it is perceived, but when the manager says 'the next game is the most important one', he genuinely means it.

You have to stay focused in football. If you lose that by thinking the next challenge you face is easy, then you will come unstuck. The last thing Liverpool want to do is be on the end of a shock result in the cup or drop points in Premier League games, such as Swansea at home or Hull away, that everyone expects them to win.

Circumstances change quickly in football. If Liverpool lost a couple of key players to injury then the next game looks harder; if we get a couple of key players back, such as Philippe Coutinho or Joel Matip, then you start thinking more positively. What you cannot do is get ahead of yourself and start thinking you've already got points in the bag before you've walked out onto the pitch. Do that and you'll definitely slip up.

Liverpool faced an equally congested run of fixtures at the start of 2016 and hopefully the experience of that will stand Klopp and his players in good stead. He'll fully understand how demanding it is now.

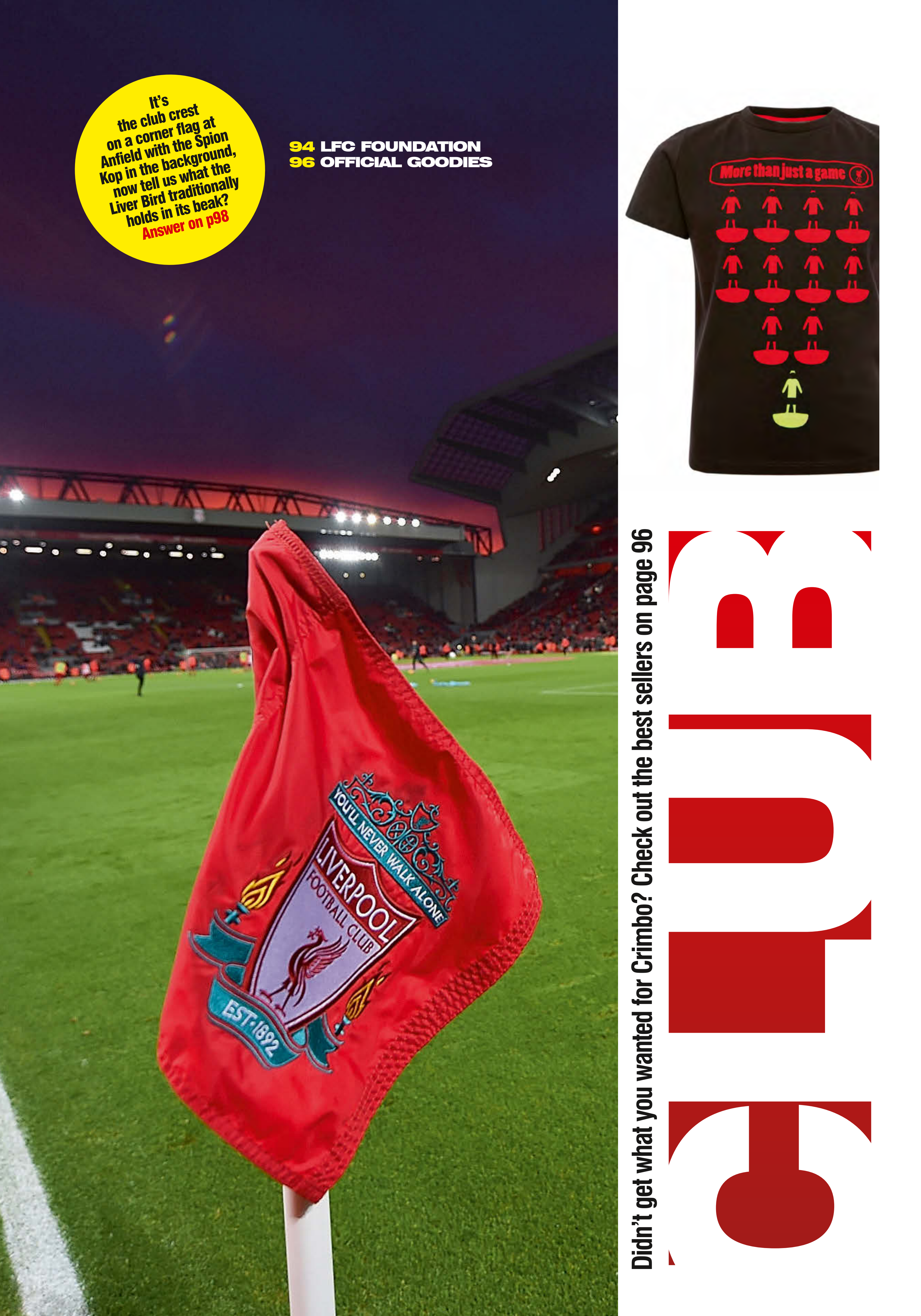
Look at La Liga. They get a winter-break and every year Barcelona and Real Madrid are in the top two or three. Look at the Bundesliga. They get a winter-break and every year Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund are up there. Now look at the Premier League. There's no winter-break but six different clubs could win the title.

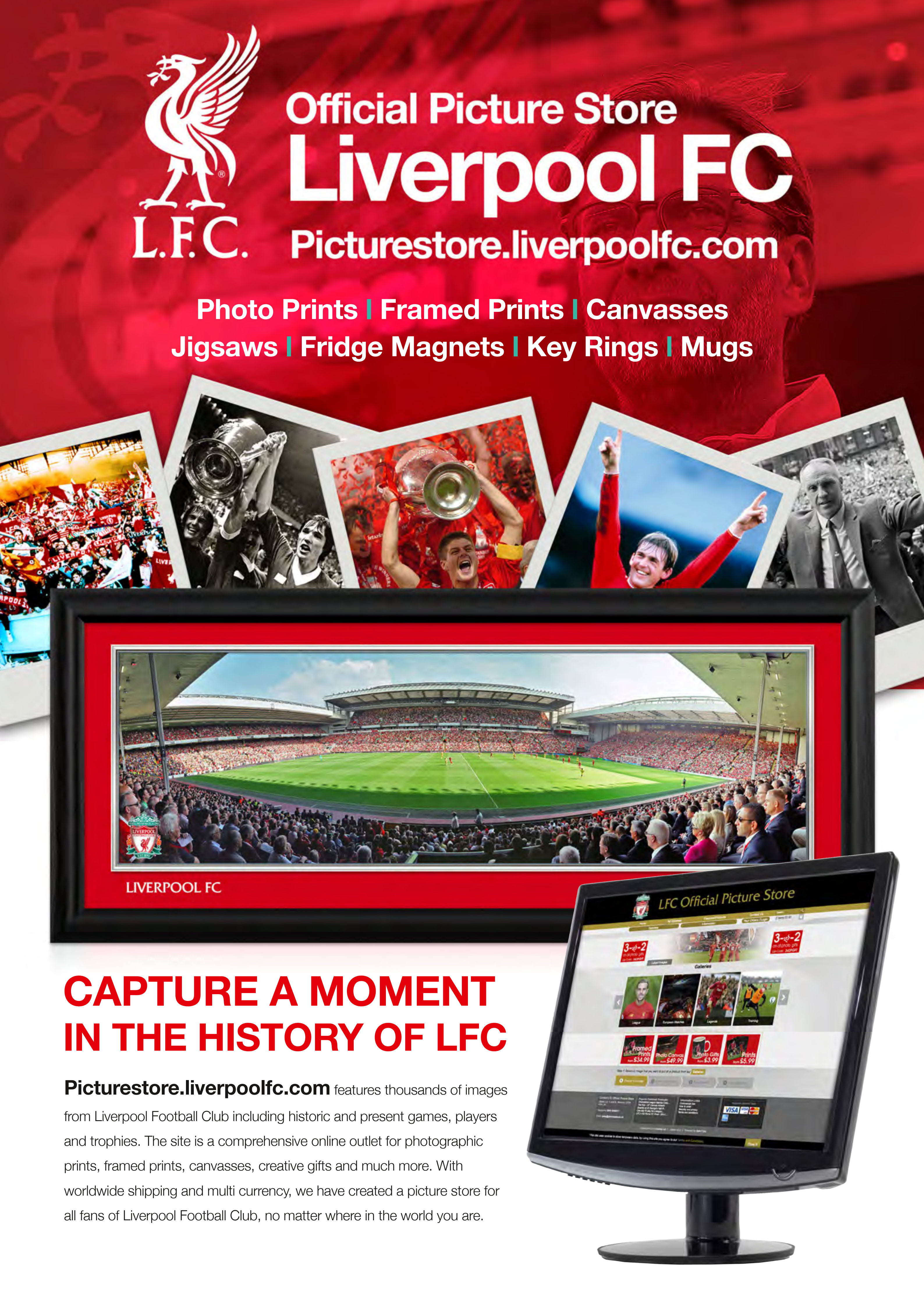
That's why England has the most demanding, entertaining and, ultimately, the best league in world football. If you're not on it every week, you get turned over, and that's why the title race is very much still on.

Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33



Healthy rivalry: Klopp and Conte


It's the club crest on a corner flag at Anfield with the Spion Kop in the background, now tell us what the Liver Bird traditionally holds in its beak?
Answer on p98
94 LFC FOUNDATION
96 OFFICIAL GOODIES
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DAYS OF OUR LIVES

Young and old get the VIP treatment at Anfield with special parties and matchday on-pitch training



Some of the youngsters training at Anfield

At the end of last year over 450 pensioners from the Anfield area attended Christmas parties at the stadium. They were held in the Reds Lounge and were also supported by Everton FC and the 'Fans Supporting Foodbanks' programme which kindly donated some food items.

Guests were greeted by LFC ambassador Gary McAllister on the first evening, then ex-Toffees player Ian Snodin 24 hours later, with a three-course Christmas meal and carol-singing all part of the festive fun. Anfield resident Eric Armstrong said: "It was a brilliant afternoon, everything was fantastic – the atmosphere, the food, the service. I'd give it a ten out of ten!" Dot Higgins, 81, added: "I had a really good time at Anfield. To share such a fun day with my friends was wonderful. The food was delicious and I really enjoyed the carol singing, I'm already looking forward to next year!"

Susan Black, director of communications at Liverpool Football Club, said: "We were delighted to host the pensioners party at Anfield and help to provide an important event to the local elderly community. Great credit goes to the many Anfield Breckside Community Council volunteers and our own club staff who volunteered to help out, from chefs and waiting staff to office staff.

"This is another fantastic example of how LFC is working with the Anfield community to help make special experiences and memories for local people."

More recently Liverpool FC Academy youngsters were given a warm Anfield welcome as they trained on the pitch during half-time in the games against Stoke City and Manchester City.

For the Stoke match, coach James Williams took the pre-Academy side onto the pitch for some small-sided games in front of the 53,000-strong crowd. Then for the visit of City, fellow coach Ryan Vaughan did the same with the Under-7s.

Head of Academy pre-recruitment Ian Barrigan said: "It's absolutely brilliant to be able to take the boys onto the Anfield pitch to do something like this. For them to see the likes of Firmino and Lallana up-close is an unbelievable experience and one that will live with them for a long time."


Scenes from the Christmas party



CRUYFF TURNS AND

Liverpool FC Foundation makes a difference in the community and the wider football world

Reds players past, present and future have been making Liverpool FC Foundation news recently, giving back to the local community and supporting important campaigns.

Former midfielder and current club ambassador Gary McAllister was a guest at the Cruyff Foundation course for coaches, appearing at Anfield alongside LFC Foundation to discuss his career and hand out certificates.

The Cruyff Foundation was established in 1997 by Dutch legend Johan Cruyff to get children active and involved in society through projects that stimulate sports and games.

Last year two community coaches from LFC Foundation attended the Cruyff Foundation course, over four days in North London. Subsequently they've worked with a number of young people, using a combination of classroom-based activities and practical sessions on the Cruyff Court at Anfield Sports & Community Centre.

"It's brilliant to see so many people from the Cruyff Foundation working with LFC and various other football clubs throughout the United Kingdom," said ex-Scotland international Gary. "Coaching in the local community is really important and provides many youngsters with the opportunity to play football, socialise and keep fit. I am really pleased for all of the successful coaches who have completed the Cruyff course and I'm sure their skills will go onto provide inspiration to many people."

Elsewhere young defender Trent Alexander-Arnold paid a special visit to his old school, Rainhill High, to present a personalised signed shirt. Trent, who joined the school when he was 12, took part in a special assembly with Year 8 students before donating the shirt as a thank-you to his former teachers and students.

Afterwards he said: "I had a fantastic six years at Rainhill and cannot thank the staff enough for their support. They really helped me to balance playing football at the Academy while making sure I got an excellent education, so I would like to personally thank them.

"To be able to visit the school as an LFC first-team squad player makes me immensely proud and I think that getting a good education is really important in any walk of life so would encourage any of the current students to take school as seriously as possible."

Rainhill High head John Pout added: "Trent has an excellent attitude, got excellent GCSE results, is a polite young man and I am delighted that he is doing so well. We have a fantastic relationship with Liverpool FC which has existed for eight years now and it makes us immensely proud to see Trent and fellow former students Sheyi [Ojo] and Jordon [Ibe, now at Bournemouth] making their mark in the Premier League."

There was an accolade for Liverpool Football Club as a whole, too, when it

CLASS ACTS

was welcomed into Show Racism the Red Card's Hall of Fame. LFC is the first Premier League club to receive this honour and accepted the award at the charity's 20th anniversary celebrations at the Houses of Parliament.

Liverpool FC has worked with and supported SRtRC for many years and Anfield recently hosted its annual educational event for over 100 local schoolchildren for the tenth year running. Simon Thornton, the club's equality and diversity advisor, said: "On behalf of the club I would like to thank SRtRC for welcoming us into their Hall of Fame, which we are extremely proud to be a part of. We are very passionate about tackling all aspects of discrimination and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion both on and off the pitch. It's fantastic that our hard work has been recognised and rewarded by SRtRC."



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QUIZ ANSWERS: LIVERPOOL p7: Anfield's highest Premier League attendance this season up to and including 31 December 2016 is 53,218 for West Brom (Saturday 22 October), and the lowest is 52,769 for Manchester United (Monday 17 October); **FOOTBALL p19:** Adama Lallana got his first Liverpool goal of the season at the Emirates when the Reds opened their Premier League account with a 4-3 win over Arsenal – his strike was the team's second on the day; **CLUB p93:** The Liver Bird traditionally holds a piece of seaweed in its beak.